So far during Advent, we have briefly covered the first two words–created and captured– which can be used to sum up the story of salvation history, which is nothing less than the story of God himself. We have heard that God **created** all things visible and invisible and called them good and he invited us to help him in his work of creation. The problem is that one of his creatures, the angel Lucifer, didn't like God's plan so he led some of the other angels into rebellion against God; they are now known as Satan and his demons. Knowing that no victory can be had over God, the devil decided to attack that which God loves, us. Since he can't destroy God, Satan wants to destroy us. He led Adam and Eve into sin in the Garden and we have been paying the price ever since. That's where I ended last week. If that was the end of the story, we would be **captured** and living without hope…but it wasn't the end of the story; in fact it was just the beginning. As soon as God discovered what had happened, he cursed the serpent (a representation of the devil) and cast Adam and Eve out of Eden…but at the same time he began to formulate a rescue mission.

Saint John tells us that the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil. Destruction can take place in a lot of different ways. If you were here on Thursday for the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, you heard me say that God's rescue mission isn't like Luke Skywalker flying in to blow up the Death Star, it's more like Frodo Baggins carrying the one ring, the superweapon of the enemy back to the place where it was created so it could be unmade. After the destruction of the Death Star, things just continued on, in fact, the Rebel Alliance was hunted and its heroes had to go into hiding. The unmaking of the enemy's ring, on the other hand, is sort of a reset button, a going back to the beginning, to a new creation–its isn't a complete blank slate but the destruction of the ring means that the enemy can no longer return and cover the lands in total darkness and slavery. This is how God chose to rescue us from captivity to the devil, sin and death.

Let's go back to the beginning. In God's good creation we find a man, a woman, an angel, a garden and a tree. The man and woman were Adam and Eve who were created without the stain of original sin. Into the Garden came a serpent–a fallen angel, Lucifer/Satan, the most cunning and subtle of all of God's creatures. He asked Eve, "Did God really say don't eat from that tree?" Eve responded, "He said we would die if we ate from it or even touched it." The serpent responded: "You won't die. God knows your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods." Eve began to doubt if God really had her and Adam's best

interests at heart so she freely chose to take matters into her own hands and…boom…darkness descends, we were captured. By the way, Genesis is clear that Adam was with her (Gen 3:6). The implications of this are beyond what I can cover today. So…in the beginning we have a man and woman created free from original sin, then there is a fallen angel who speaks to the woman and causes doubt, and finally there is a tree and this whole scene takes place in a garden. The outcome of this scene is captivity to sin and death.

The course of salvation history from that moment on is the story of the enmity between the offspring of the serpent and the offspring of the woman; there are are victories and defeats, heroes and villains, with all of it building to a climactic confrontation involving another garden, another tree, another angel, another woman and another man. The man is Jesus, the Son of God who is also the new Adam–by the way, in Jesus' genealogy in Luke's gospel Adam is identified as a son of God. The woman: Jesus' mother Mary, the New Eve. The angle: the archangel Gabriel. The tree: the wood of the Cross. The garden: Gethsemane.

Gabriel spoke to Mary like the serpent spoke to Eve. The words of both angels prompted questions from the women they faced. Eve's question was in her heart, something like "Can really I trust the word of God." Mary's question was explicit, "How can this be?" Eve doubted God, picked the fruit from the tree and gave it to Adam. Mary trusted God: "May it be done to me according to your word" and gave birth to Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus fought against the temptation to take an easier path: "Father may this cup pass from me…nevertheless, not my will but your will be done." In the end, Jesus took upon himself all of our sins–Paul says he became sin–and was nailed to a tree, the wood of the cross, paying the price that no human can pay on his or her own. The power of sin and death were killed. Yes…we still sin and yes, we still die, but had Jesus not reversed what happened in the Garden of Eden, sin and death would be permanent and would forever be our masters. Because of what happened on Calvary sin and death no longer have eternal power over us. At a tree, Adam and Eve became slaves to sin and death. On another tree–the wood of the Cross–Jesus freed us from the eternal consequences of sin and death and gave us the hope of the resurrection. The eternal power of sin and death over us has been unmade and we are living in a new creation.

Let's go back to the beginning one more time. Before the Fall, God invited Adam and Eve to be his coworkers by caring for his creation. What about after the

fall? Do we still have a role to play? Did Jesus carry the cross by himself? Was he alone on Calvary? Simon of Cyrene helped Jesus carry the cross and the good thief, Dismas, hung beside Jesus on Calvary and recognized him for who he really was. Jesus' mother Mary, St John, Mary Magdalene and other women stood at the foot of the cross. Our redemption is through Christ alone but Jesus had companions along the way. Meaning… Jesus came to reclaim his rightful Kingdom but he didn't do it all on his own. He enlisted others to help him. The question to ponder before next weekend is…how are you going to **respond** to Jesus' invitation. God wants his world back. Will you help him fight for it?