The Story of Christmas is the Story of the Bible (Part 2)

Batman and the Joker

Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader

Frodo Baggins and Sauron

Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham

These are all classic protagonist vs. antagonist stories that have been eloquently developed by writers and directors over the years. In each of these cases, as you engage with the storyline, the reader or viewer finds themselves amidst gripping conflict and well developed plot.

Before we get to deep into the sermon, I think it wise to define a couple of terms.

**Protagonist** – the character responsible for handling the main problem and the one most in need of change, emotionally.

**Antagonist** – the primary bad guy. The character that opposes the protagonist outright on all counts, physically and emotionally.

**Mentor** – the protagonist’s conscience and the prevailing side to the thematic argument. The mentor voices or represents the lesson that must be learned by the protagonist in order to change for the better and achieve the goal. (Note: Be mindful of creating a mentor who is as perfect and principled as humans can be, for doing so will make the character seem inhuman. Instead, let the mentor be flawed, like all us humans.)

**Tempter** – the right-hand to the antagonist. The tempter doesn’t need to know the antagonist, but they both stand for the same thing: stopping the protagonist from achieving the protagonist’s goal. The tempter tries to manipulate and convince the protagonist to join the “dark side”. However, in the end, the tempter can change his/her mind and realize the benefit of joining the good guys.

 Last week as I introduced the setting and the characters, in the story of the Bible, I finished up by telling you that the plot would thicken and the conflict was coming.

We started at mankind’s beginning. A beginning that God our Creator chose to speak into existence. He created for us a paradise in which we were intended live a blessed and fruitful life with Him and the rest of His created order. But it doesn’t seem to have taken very long for conflict to arise. We will pick up with our story in Genesis 2, verse 15.

15 The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. 16 But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— 17 except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

18 Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.” 19 So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. 20 He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

21 So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. 22 Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

23 “At last!” the man exclaimed.

“This one is bone from my bone,

 and flesh from my flesh!

She will be called ‘woman,’

 because she was taken from ‘man.’”

24 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

25 Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:15-25 NLT

Man and woman are together, and naked, and joined as one without shame. In otherwords, they knew each other deeply, intimately and physically and, at least at this point, they weren’t running around pointing out each other faults. In fact, it seems they either had no faults or at the very least they had no awareness of what sin and guilt and good and evil. But as someone once said “Curiosity killed the cat.” Remember God had only given them one limiting command. When He said:

“You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— 17 except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

Genesis 2:16-17 NLT

Seems easy enough. Picture yourself as 17 and your parents are getting ready to leave for a month long vacation. You are going to have the whole house to yourself to do what you want, when you want.

Your mom says, “You can eat anything in the fridge and the cupboards just don’t drink any of the wine or the liquor.”

Or your dad says, “While we are gone you can drive any of the cars in the driveway except for the Corvette. If you drive the vette, you are dead meat!”

But wait, you have never tried wine or liquor, and you are pretty sure that driving a Corvette has got to be an incredible experience. “What do they know?” you think to yourself. I can handle it. This must have been a little bit what it was like for Adam and Eve, in the Garden. And the serpent saw the opportunity and because misery loves company, the Bible says:

3 The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

2 “Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied. 3 “It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”

4 “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. 5 “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

Genesis 3:1-5 NLT

The serpent was kinda like that teenage friend of yours who was always “helping” you to have a good time. “Drive the vette, you can handle the power,” they might say. Or “Come on we can drink some of the booze and just put some water back in the bottle, it will be fun, your parents just don’t want you to have any fun.”

But without knowledgeable experience, Corvettes and alcohol can be very dangerous business especially if you mix the two.

So let’s see how Adam and Eve respond to their tempter. Which is, by the way, a word that is used to describe a character in literature. As one website explains:

Tempter – the right-hand to the antagonist. The tempter doesn’t need to know the antagonist, but they both stand for the same thing: stopping the protagonist from achieving the protagonist’s goal. The tempter tries to manipulate and convince the protagonist to join the “dark side”.

So like I said, let’s see how mankind responds.

6 The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. 7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

Genesis 3:6-7 NLT

Putting this in our perspective, the 17 year old threw a party, drank from the liquor cabinet and had a couple close calls while burning up the tires (and the clutch) in the Corvette. So the kid filled the bottles with water and changed the oil in the car as a cover up.

The problem is most parents are pretty savy. They know the usual color of their bourbon, they notice that the clutch is slipping a little, and it is almost impossible to get the smell of smoke out of your house after a high school party!

Guess what God noticed. Genesis goes on to say:

8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. 9 Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”

11 “Who told you that you were naked?” the Lord God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

12 The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

13 Then the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?”

“The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

Genesis 3:8-13 NLT

It was my friend who made me do it. She is such a bad influence!

Some parents buy into this, they think their kid is the innocent one who is never to blame. But God cannot be fooled. He punishes all of the guilty parties involved.

14 Then the Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, you are cursed

 more than all animals, domestic and wild.

You will crawl on your belly,

 groveling in the dust as long as you live.

15 And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,

 and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike your head,

 and you will strike his heel.”

16 Then he said to the woman,

“I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy,

 and in pain you will give birth.

And you will desire to control your husband,

 but he will rule over you.”

17 And to the man he said,

“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree

 whose fruit I commanded you not to eat,

the ground is cursed because of you.

 All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it.

18 It will grow thorns and thistles for you,

 though you will eat of its grains.

19 By the sweat of your brow

 will you have food to eat

until you return to the ground

 from which you were made.

For you were made from dust,

 and to dust you will return.”

Genesis 3:14-19 NLT

Now we see the protagonist and a couple of antagonists. But the Bible is a little more complex of a story than that. Because, if you are like me, we find ourselves rooting at least a little bit for Adam and Eve. Hopefully the same way you root for the wayward teenager who has made a few mistakes.

In the same way that the 17 year old messed up their blissful housesitting experience so Adam and Eve and the serpent brought shame and difficult consequences into their once harmonious relationship with God. God had warned them that they would die. Some people focus on the physical aspect of death when interpreting this. But I believe the separation from God is the death that He had warned them of.

God had been with man and for man and man was for God and with God. But mankind’s disobedience brought separation and division.

Think of the 17 year old and their parents. They weren’t really going to kill their kid for driving the vette or getting into their stash. But because of the teenager’s disobedience, the old relationship of trust and freedom, is gone. Trust will probably be replaced with a lock on the cabinet and club on the steering wheel.

In fact, this is the same reasoning that God used with the people that He had created in His own image.

20 Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live. 21 And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

22 Then the Lord God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!” 23 So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. 24 After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:20-24 NLT

Now we see the conflict at hand. Mankind is at odds with God the Creator. As the plot unfolds we will see that from one view of the story, God is the protagonist and the world, the flesh and the devil are the antagonists.

And in another part of the story it is easy to view man as the protagonist who is being mentored toward the resolution.

This can make sense if I use our definition of protagonist to explain it. Remember the definition I used was:

Protagonist – the character responsible for handling the main problem and the one most in need of change, emotionally.

I will put it this way.

God is the character responsible for handling the main problem and Man is the one most in need of the change!

The way that this happens is that God becomes a man. He becomes the representative of mankind that handles the main problem. As Paul wrote to the Romans:

12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. 13 Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. 14 Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. 15 But there is a great difference between Adam’s sin and God’s gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. 16 And the result of God’s gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man’s sin. For Adam’s sin led to condemnation, but God’s free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. 17 For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.

18 Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

Romans 5:12-19 NLT

When God said to the serpent:

15 And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,

 and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike your head,

 and you will strike his heel.”

Genesis 3:15 NLT

He was foreshadowing the resolution. Jesus was the one who would strike the death blow to the devil and He would do it by destroying the wall between God and man.

If we can accept this, we can truly enter back into oneness with God and trust Him for the resolution. In this position we can proclaim, “If God is for us, then who can be against us!”

Unfortunately, this requires us to believe Him. And believing Him seems to be in the same realm as a teenager believing the advice of their parents. It’s possible, but borderline miraculous. Thankfully, the story of Christmas is a time of miracle!