

July 28, 2024
Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Genesis 9:8–17

THE SIGN AND PROMISES OF GOD

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Great Flood stories and Flood Myths are common across a wide range of cultures around the world. But when it comes to the biblical record of the Great Flood and the ark of Noah, as Christians, we believe that *this* narrative is no myth. It's an accurate historical account of an event that occurred at a specific time and place in history. You know the story which ends with a beautiful rainbow. But not everyone understands the significance of the promise which God, Himself, attached to His rainbow in the clouds.

For many people, and even for many Christians, the rainbow has come to hold all kinds of associations: happiness, peace, enlightenment, new beginnings. In Irish folklore, the end of the rainbow is where leprechauns hide their pots of gold. In American film folklore, a young girl named Dorothy from Kansas believed that somewhere over the rainbow dreams really do come true. The LGBTQ community sees the rainbow as a welcome sign and symbol their pride of godless sexual perversions and proclivities. But the rainbow is God's rainbow. He's the One who created it. He hung it in the sky and attached His promise to it. Scientists explain the rainbow is simply the result of the refraction and reflection of light rays being bent as they pass through droplets of water. But like every other law of nature and physics, God created them too.

In the beginning, the powerful Word of God spoke all things visible and invisible into existence. For six days God created and lastly on that sixth day:

"... God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:27–28)

Mankind was the crown of God's creation, superior to the other creatures. But when crafty serpent slithered into the Garden and deceived the man and woman, sin came into the world. (cf: Genesis 3:1–7) Because of sin, Adam and Eve knew they were naked. Because of sin, Cain would kill his brother Abel. (cf: Genesis 4:8) And as mankind began to multiply on the face of the earth, he was no longer born in the pure and perfect image of God, but in the sinful, imperfect likeness and image of Adam. (cf: Genesis 5:3)

Generation after generation, each become progressively worse until the Lord God saw the wickedness of man had engulfed the earth. Depravity and evil was hopelessly ingrained into all mankind. Of all that God had created and saw as "*very good*" at the close of the sixth day of creation, (cf: Genesis 1:31) He now regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved

him to his heart. He resolved to destroy every living breathing thing on earth in a Great Flood. (cf: Genesis 6:1–7)

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” (Genesis 6:8)

According to God’s strict judgment, the unbelieving world would be condemned through a great flood, but according to His great mercy, believing Noah and his family, eight souls in all, would be preserved inside an ark. God commanded Noah to build an ark big enough to contain the male and female of every sort of bird and animal and creeping thing that moved on the ground, each according to their kinds. Up to this point in biblical history, it had never rained. God had sent a mist that would come up from the land and water the earth. (cf: Genesis 2:5–6) But now, in His righteous anger and judgment, God was going to send rain – and not just ordinary rain. He would open the floodgates of His wrath against sin.

The narrative of Noah and the ark teaches us about the promises of God and the testing of our faith. None of us can work out our own salvation, but need the providence and grace of God. God promised Noah that He would establish a covenant with him and save him and his family inside the ark. (cf: Genesis 6:18) But to everyone else who was watching Noah – they thought Noah was nuts. Who needed an ark when no one knew anything about rain and floodwaters?

Scholars estimate it took anywhere from sixty to one hundred years to complete the ark. We can only imagine the smugness and insults of the scoffers who saw Noah building the massive ark. For sixty to one hundred years, Noah would likely hear the scoffers shouting: [sarcasm on →] *“There’s crazy old Noah building his ark. Where does he think he’s going to float this thing? Where’s the water going to come from?”* [← sarcasm off] But Noah stood alone in the face of mockery and the spiteful opinions of all who passed by. Amid all the insults and persecution, by faith and in reverent fear of the Lord, Noah followed God’s command to save his family and preserve a remnant of creatures to repopulate the earth. (cf: Hebrews 11:7)

Perhaps the sinful scoffers thought Noah was a conspiracy theorist – but then it started to rain. When God’s patience against mankind’s sin expired, He shut Noah, his family, the animals, and enough food for man and beast, safely shut inside the ark – and the floodgates of heaven and earth burst forth. In a moment, millions and millions of unsuspecting and unbelieving humans and creatures were swept away and drowned by floodwaters. For forty days the floods poured, and the waters rose as the ark floated up higher and higher on the face of the waters, which eventually covered the highest mountain top on earth. God had blotted out every living thing from the earth. Only Noah and those with him in the ark were safely left behind. (cf: Genesis 7:23–24)

After 150 days God remembered Noah and all that was in the ark and He caused the wind to blow over the earth, and the waters subsided. (cf: Genesis 7:24–8:5) After another 150 days, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. As anxious as you and I might have been to disembark and get out and go exploring, Noah waited on God’s command to the exit. (cf: Genesis 8:16) Seventy-six days later, over a year after God had shut them inside the ark, God finally instructed Noah and his family to leave the ark. (cf: Genesis 8:13–16)

They all emerged into a changed and changing world. It’s hard to imagine the absence of any life on the earth or in the sky. The quietness of death was in the air. But it was a testimony to God’s wrath against sin. Echoing His words to Adam and Eve on the sixth day of creation:

“... God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” (Genesis 9:1)

Mankind would still have dominion over the animals, but in this changed world, the animals would live in fear of man. And man would no longer be a vegetarian, but was given all things to eat, with the exception of animal flesh with its blood, for there is life in the flesh and blood. (Genesis 9:2–5) Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings. (Genesis 8:20) When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, He said in His heart:

“I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.” (Genesis 8:21)

Prior to the flood, God promised Noah that He would establish a covenant with Noah and save him and his family inside the ark. As our Old Testament text begins this morning, as always, God keeps His promise. God said to Noah and his sons a word of promise and hope for sinners and for all creation, saying:

“I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” (Genesis 9:8–11)

Of everything that had changed due to the flood, one thing had not changed. The curse of Adam’s sin *was not* destroyed. Because of Adam’s trespass, physical death would come to all men. Because of Adam’s disobedience all mankind were are born sinners. (cf: Romans 5:17–19) Human wickedness and sin continues to be woven within the very fiber of all mankind. The evidence of this we see immediately following our Old Testament text, where the narrative records Noah’s son Ham, seeing Noah laying drunk and naked in this tent, and he fails to cover up the shame of his nakedness. (cf: Genesis 9:18–27)

Yet over and over again in our text, God repeats His words. He repeats His promise. He repeats His description of His covenant between Him and all living things, that He would never again destroy the earth and all flesh by means of a flood. Maybe Noah and his sons needed to hear this promise over and over again. Maybe you need to hear it over and over again. And for mankind’s sinful and unbelieving heart, God gave a visible sign to confirm His covenant. He placed His bow in the clouds... the rainbow.

As I said earlier, you know the story ends with a beautiful rainbow. But not everyone understands the significance of the promise which God, Himself, attached to His rainbow. The rainbow is the sign of a covenant of grace, created by God, for man, still who is ***“evil from his youth.”*** None of us can work out our own salvation but need the providence and grace of God. God is the creator of all things, and all things belong to Him. Mankind has ***not one thing*** to contribute that would move God to enter into this covenantal contract.

The rainbow is a visible sign and pledge that God will never revoke His covenant with Noah and all mankind. The rainbow is a sign that represents a bilateral agreement – only to the extent that man agreed to accept what God had pledged – and to recognize His sovereign right to rule the world according to His will, that He would bless the earth so that it would never cease to sustain

life. Yet the rainbow is more than a sign of God's promise of the physical well-being of the earth and human life. It's also a sign of God's salvation by grace for all mankind.

Other covenants would follow. (cf: Genesis 15:18, 17:2 ff..., Exodus 24:7 ff...) But each God given covenant was His promise of redemption, looking forward to a "new covenant." (cf: Jeremiah 31:31, Ezekiel 37:26, Hebrews 8:8–10, 10:16–17) A new covenant sealed in the body and blood of Christ Jesus, (cf: Matthew 26:26–28) in which all of God's previous promises of salvation reached their goal of fulfillment. St. Paul writes:

"... because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:17–19)

As we look around the world in these dark and later days and it seems that each generation has become progressively more evil than the last. The wickedness of man no longer is hidden in the darkness but is celebrated in front of men, women, and children – even at the opening ceremonies of the Summer Olympic Games. We pray: "Come quickly Lord Jesus.

Take heart dear Christian, for God has given you His signs and promises. While looking to the rainbow is a marvel testifying to the patience and grace of God and confirming His promise to Noah and the world, it points forward to the Good News of forgiveness and salvation through Christ Jesus our Lord, confirmed in other God-given signs. He gives you the sign of Baptism, where He attaches His Word to water to save those drowning in sin. St. Peter writes that, Baptism, which corresponds to the waters of Noah's flood, now saves you, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (cf: 1 Peter 3:21) He give you His sign in the Lord's Supper where He attaches His Word to bread and wine, Jesus body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of you faith – through this life unto life eternal – for there is life in the flesh and blood.

God is faithful to His promises and covenants, even when people are not. The message of every rainbow tells us God is faithful to His promise to provide a Savior. In His visible signs of grace in the preaching of His Word, in Baptism, and in His Holy Supper, our Lord establishes and sustains His kingdom. Christ has indeed won full forgiveness of sins and salvation for you and the whole world in His perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection. He distributes this same grace – forgiveness, life, salvation, and your bodily resurrection in His signs of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. You have His promise. You have His Word. Just as God delivered believing Noah and his family through flood waters, He delivers you though His Word and Sacrament.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.