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Noah's Ark and the Rainbow

Genesis 6:5–9:17 · Bud · Ages 9–12

By Genesis 6, the brokenness that began with Adam and Eve has spread everywhere. The text says human hearts were set on evil all the time and the earth was filled with violence. God is not described as cold or angry for no reason; his heart is full of sorrow (Gen 6:6). Sin hurts people, and it hurts the God who made them.

Noah stands out. He is a good man who lives rightly before God when almost no one else does. God tells him that judgment is coming in the form of a flood, and gives him detailed instructions: build an ark of wood, with rooms, sealed with pitch, about 450 feet long, three decks high, with a door in the side. Noah obeys exactly.

God also makes a promise before the rain falls: he will establish his covenant with Noah. Noah's family of eight, his wife, his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, and their wives, go into the ark with pairs of every kind of animal (and seven pairs of the clean animals, Gen 7:2). God himself closes the door.

The flood comes from below and above, and the waters rise until even the high mountains are covered. Every living thing on the land outside the ark dies. Genesis states it plainly and without gruesome detail, and so should we. Judgment is real. But so is rescue: God has not forgotten Noah and everyone with him (Gen 8:1).

God sends a wind, and the waters slowly go down. The ark comes to rest high in the Ararat mountains. Noah sends out a raven, then a dove. The dove returns with a new olive twig, a sign that plants are growing again. A week later it doesn't return at all.

When God tells them to come out, Noah's first act is worship: he builds an altar and offers sacrifice. God responds with a covenant, a solemn promise binding himself to all creation: never again will a flood destroy all life on earth. The sign is the rainbow set in the clouds, a reminder to God himself and to every generation.

The New Testament sees this story pointing to Christ. Peter writes that just as Noah's family was saved through water, Baptism now saves us through the Resurrection of Jesus (1 Pt 3:20–21). And the ark became an early picture of the Church, where God gathers his people to keep them safe.

Talk about it

1. Why was God grieved, and what did he decide to do?
2. What did Noah do first when he came out of the ark, and why does that matter?
3. How does the ark point to Baptism and the Church?

Key verse: Gen 9:13. Look it up in your Bible.