

20 March 2019
Lent 2 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Ark of the Church”

Text: Genesis 7:1-5, 11-18; 8:6-18; 9:8-13; The Passion, part 2

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

And everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. Everything. The only exception being whoever and whatever, the people and the animals, in the ark. God, in His mercy, saved them.

How frightening those days must have been, when *all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened*. Noah didn't see it, having been shut up in the ark by God, but the noise and sounds must have been more than eerie - but positively bone-chilling. And then when the ark first began to shudder and move . . . and then float. Sadness mixed with joy mixed with horror mixed with wonder. It was really happening. This day for which Noah had waited and prepared for 120 years. It was happening, and it was terrifying. Hearing the wrath of God against sin and evil.

And Jesus began to be full of sorrow and turmoil. Then he said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." . . . He fell on his face and prayed . . . "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup from me . . ."

Jesus had faced opposition, persecution, and threats against Him all through His life, yet now, this was different. Never before had He been in such *turmoil*. He ***falls on His face*** on the ground. Sweat falls ***like great drops of blood***. Because it's about to happen. The day for which He had waited and prepared for the three years of His public ministry. It was happening, and it was terrifying. The *fountains of the great deep and the windows of the heavens* were about to be opened again. But this time it would not be water gushing forth from them to destroy the world, but the wrath of God against sin and evil to destroy Him. Jesus. ***Let these others go***, Jesus had said. This flood of God's wrath and punishment He would endure alone.

Caiaphas had almost gotten it right. He said that ***it would be expedient that one man should die for the people***, rather than the whole nation perish. No - one man will die for the WORLD, rather than the world perish.

God promised to *never again destroy the world with a flood*. But it's not because we're better now than they were then. The sin and evil in the world today deserves nothing less. But God promised because He knew what He was going to do. He knew how He would deal with the sin of the world. He gave Noah a picture, a glimpse, of the *real* thing. We think the flood in Noah's day horrible, but the next one would be far worse. In Noah's day, a few were saved and the world perished. Now, the world would be saved because this one man would perish; be engulfed in the flood of God's wrath. This man who was, in fact, more than just a man, but the very Son of God.

When it was over, when the 40 days of rushing water and torrential rain was over, how eerie the quiet must have been for Noah and His family, until the ark was opened and they could walk out; the joy of life beginning again. How quiet, too, when the flood of God's wrath poured out upon Jesus on the cross was over and Jesus lay silent in the tomb. How quiet, until the tomb was opened and the joy of new life began.

That is the joy that is now ours. For in Holy Baptism, Paul tells us, we are baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection. *What does that mean?* That means that baptism puts us into Jesus. Baptism puts us onto the cross with Jesus to be crucified with Him. **But Jesus is our ark**. So that when the flood of God's wrath pours forth, it does not destroy or engulf us - but Him. And we are safe in Him. He protects us from the danger. And when His tomb is then opened, it was not for Him to walk out - He was already risen! - it is for us to walk out. That as His grave is empty, so will ours be. All who are in the ark of Jesus' body. All who are saved there from the wrath of God against sin.

We are told that Noah was *righteous before God in his generation*. That is why he was not swept up in the flood. But perhaps, you think, you are not so righteous. But this righteousness is not from us or of us, not that we're good or better than others. Righteousness is always from God, a gift from Him to us, by grace through faith. To say that Noah was righteous is to say that He believed - He believed in the promise of God, the promise of a Saviour. If our own personal righteousness was the requirement, then Noah would not have been saved, and neither would Peter, James, and John who fell asleep instead of praying with Jesus, and neither would Peter for denying three times that He even knew Jesus. And neither would we be saved.

But for us, too, righteousness is the gift of God that we receive by grace through faith. The righteousness of the forgiveness of sins. The righteousness won for us by Jesus on the cross, but available to all before then and since then, by faith in the Word and promises of God.

And so the gift of forgiveness, then, is still being given and keeping us safe. For if we are baptized into Jesus, then this, too, is true: we are baptized into His body, which is the church (Colossians 1:18). And so the church is now, for us, the ark in which we are kept safe. The ark which shelters us. The ark which preaches Jesus and what He has done for us to

all the world. The ark in which we are fed by Jesus, with Jesus. The ark which will carry us through the storms of this world and life until our graves are opened and our new life, our eternal life, begins. The church not as building or institution, but the church which is the body of Christ. The church which is His gift to us, and which gives us His gifts.

So the moment had arrived. It was really happening. The flood was about to begin. Not Noah's . . . the worse one. How puny and weak and small the detachment and officers and weapons which came to arrest Jesus must have looked to Jesus. They were nothing. One word of His made them all fall helplessly to the ground. They were nothing compared to the flood that was about to fall upon Jesus. But He was ready. Peter strikes with the sword. *No more of that*, Jesus says. One man is about to be engulfed for the sin of the world. And it will happen, just as it was written. It will happen, because He loves us. It will happen, and we will live.

And so in the Easter Vigil, we rejoice as we hear the story of the flood. For we know not just the story, but what it means for us today. And so we pray:

O Lord, You kill and You raise to life; You brought the flood upon a wicked and perverse generation, and yet you saved faithful Noah and his family in the ark. Keep us in safety in the ark of Christ's body, the Church, that Your mercy may come to its fullness and Your salvation be preached to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.