

Genesis 9:8-17

If you were to check the encyclopedia under the entry: "rainbow," you would find a scientific explanation for its existence. Yet I doubt if anyone, when gazing at a rainbow, actually considers in their mind all of the scientific details behind it. The bow draws our gaze because of its beauty. It is refreshing, especially in the wake of a dark and terrifying storm, to look up into the sky and see the brilliant colors of a peaceful rainbow.

This would have been especially true for Noah and his family. Our eyes have never seen a storm like the one they lived through. Not only did the rain come crashing down from above for forty days; from beneath the earth the fountains of the deep burst open. Volcanoes would have been erupting over and over. Earthquakes would have been violently shaking the earth to its core. Mountains were rising. Great canyons were forming. The dinosaurs were dying off. Every living thing upon the face of the earth which required the breath of life to survive, including man, perished.

Almost a year later, Noah and his family left the ark and walked out onto dry ground. And even though everything around them looked peaceful; even though the storm...the Great Flood of God's wrath was over, in their minds they were surely wondering, could it all happen again? Could we at some time in the future anger God so much by our sinful behavior, that He will again destroy the earth and all of its inhabitants? But even before they could have pondered such things, God told them to look up into the sky. And when they did, they saw a beautiful rainbow. "See," God said, "I have set My bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth...the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh."

As beautiful as that promise is, I doubt very much that it comes to our minds when we gaze at a rainbow. We do not consider the scientific explanation behind it; we do not consider God's promise attached to it. Like most people, we look at the bow only for its beauty. But there is something we need to know. When you look at a rainbow, God is looking back at you. In the rainbow our eyes meet the gaze of God. He did not set the bow in the clouds only for us to look at; He put it there for His eyes as well. "When the bow is in the clouds," He says, "I will see it, and I will remember My covenant between Me and the earth."

Perhaps with our busy schedules, we do not even pause much anymore to gaze up at a rainbow. Perhaps we have become so accustomed to it that we now take the bow for granted. But not God. The bow is His sign; the sign of His promise to all the earth. And so when a bow appears anywhere on this earth, God's eyes are gazing upon it remembering His covenant with us.

Before the Flood there were no rainbows. Science may not agree, but the Bible tells us that God, in those days, watered the earth not with rain, but with a mist that rose from the ground. The rain waters were held back high above the earth by a firmament. And most likely, the first rain upon the earth happened on the first day of the Great Flood. How shocked all the people would have been to have water fall on them from above. How terrified they would have been when it came down in torrents and did not stop. And so, when it all was over, the first rainbow would have been the one God showed to Noah. But every bow since that day is set before us with the exact same promise behind it. It is God's sign to you of His grace and loving kindness.

Scientifically we know that a rainbow is formed by the sun shining on the droplets of water in the clouds. So a rainbow is made up of sun and water. God's promise...His covenant with you, first given to Noah, is attached to the sun and the water. Consider with me our baptism into Christ. Is it not

identical to the rainbow? God's promise there is attached to the Son and the water. When the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is in the water of Holy Baptism; when His words are joined to the water, there is God's everlasting promise for you. God's rainbow covenant is joined to the beautiful creation formed when the sunshine comes into contact with the water in the clouds. God's baptismal promise is joined to the beautiful creation--you--which came about when His Son, our Lord, joined Himself with the water in the font to make you a child of promise. Just as the rainbow is a sign, so is your baptism. The bow tells us that God will never again pour out His wrath like a flood upon the earth. The sign of your baptism tells you that because God's Son was poured out upon you, and into you, with the water, He is never angry at you; He will never punish you for your sinful behavior; He is at peace with you; He forgives you.

Even more than the rainbow, your baptism is that place where you see the merciful God gazing upon you. As with a rainbow, so your baptism is a sign for God. Like the blood upon the doorposts in Egypt...when the Angel of Death saw that sign, he passed over that house and did not kill the firstborn sons of Israel. God does not look upon you apart from your baptism. He sees you only in Christ, covered with His redeeming blood, one for whom He died. And so God passes over you with His wrath, for Jesus took that punishment in your place.

Wherever you go in life...walking down the sidewalks of Augusta, driving the streets of St. Louis...there is a rainbow covering you--the bow of your baptism into Christ Jesus. Your baptism reminds you daily that you are God's child; and even more, when God sees that rainbow over you, He remembers that Jesus' blood covers you; that because of your baptism you are always His forgiven one.

But as with rainbows, are we also now in the habit of not looking to our baptism? Are we not amazed anymore? Do we pass by the baptism font without even a glance because fonts and rainbows are things that we now take for granted? Do we refrain from making the sign of the cross over our heart to remember our baptism because there is a stigma attached to that sign? Do we celebrate with joy the birth of our children, but do nothing to remember their birth by baptism into God's family? Sadly it seems that the sign of Christian baptism has gone the way of the sign of the rainbow. It's something pretty to look at, but means very little for our daily life. And that may be true for most Christians. We pass by bows and fonts with hardly a glance, and quickly get on to our real life.

Until...the storms come. Most storms we ignore. But when a big one comes...one that blows shingles off the roof, and shakes the house, and breaks branches, and makes us remember that we are weak and mortal...then when the rainbow appears--then it truly has meaning; then our hearts are lifted and we rest in peace because we see the sign of the rainbow.

And so also when the storms come into our life and do their damage to our savings account, and to our marriage, and to our health, and to our conscience, and we remember how utterly sinful and helpless we are, and that we dare not presume to stand before God for we all have disobeyed Him...then we must look to our baptism and remember who we are, and that God is looking back at us in love. Then your baptism takes on new meaning for you. Then you can say with confidence, "No matter what I lose in this world, God found me in Christ and I am His." Then when the storms of life have done their worst to you, you can look to your baptism and say with joy, "But heaven is mine; Jesus gives me life in those sacred waters." Then when the storms of your sins have plunged you deep into the darkness, far away from the light of God's grace, you can look to your baptism and know beyond any doubt whatsoever that you are forgiven for every sin; that God has not abandoned

you; that He was with you in the storm even though you did not see Him; that the rainbow of your baptism, even when all is dark, still covers you. This is God's promise to you.

It was dark for Noah and his family. For over a year it was dark. But then the bow came. And it came not because they asked for it; not because they earned it. It came by grace. The sign of the rainbow is a covenant of grace. Noah and his family and all their descendants have done nothing to cause the sign of the rainbow and God's promise attached to it. And so it is with your baptism. You and I have done nothing to cause God to place us with Christ in those waters. We did nothing to earn a seat at His Table; nothing to merit His mercy. It's all by grace. The rainbow of your baptism first covered you when the waters were poured over your head. And that bow stays with you day after day as a sign from God that by His grace alone you are one redeemed by Christ the Crucified; you are precious to Him and loved by Him; you are forgiven.

Where the sun (Son) and the water join together, there stands God's promise. In the sky for all the earth to see. In your baptism for you to see and remember always. Amen.