

## Genesis 9:8-17

When our eyes gaze heavenward to look at a rainbow in the clouds, the eyes of God are looking back at us. Not in anger, no matter how fierce the storm may have been that preceded the coming of the rainbow; God's gaze is one of mercy and promise. This is not sentimental, wishful thinking. This is backed up with Scripture--today's text in Genesis 9: "*When the bow is in the clouds,*" (said God to Noah), "*I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.*"

Science has an explanation for rainbows which has nothing to do with God. Some people, when they see one, still look for the leprechaun with his pot of gold. Some journey with Dorothy to the land of Oz. We may have seen dozens, even hundreds of rainbows in our lifetime. Yet we still look up when one appears. It may be because of its beauty, but nonetheless, we look. Our eyes gaze heavenward, and this is good, for our eyes meet the gaze of God.

Two things are needed for a rainbow to appear. One is the sun with its rays. The other is water--droplets of water up in the sky. As the rays of the sun shine on the water droplets, the rainbow appears in the clouds, and our eyes meet the gaze of God. Is this not a beautiful description of our Baptism? Two things are needed for Baptism: the Son and water. Jesus, the Son of God, is the living Word. And as this Word of command and promise is joined to the droplets of water in the baptismal font, God's eyes are turned toward us in mercy, and our eyes meet His gaze with faith. For in Baptism, God's Spirit creates faith, cleansing our hearts, just as the earth was cleansed after the Great Flood.

Think about why there even was a rainbow in the first place. Mankind was so wicked that God was sorry He had created him. Except for eight people--Noah and his family--God drowned with water and destroyed every person on the earth. This was no small thing. Many thousands, even millions of people, would have been alive at this time, and they all perished.

What if God were to act in this way again? For surely the wicked world we have today is just as wicked as in the days of Noah. And who do we think we are--people who are better than our sinful neighbors? Oh no! If my neighbor perishes on account of his sinfulness, so do I. For I am just as wicked as he is. And I should know better. I'm a Christian; he is not. I go to church; he doesn't. According to the Law of God, there is no difference between you, and me, and every wicked person out there. And if we don't agree, then we're calling God a liar. "*All have sinned,*" He says in Romans 3, "*and have fallen short of the glory of God...there is none who is good...no, not one.*"

But we have the rainbow. We have God's promise attached to this beautiful sign that He will never again drown the earth in a great flood. For this is the covenant He made with Noah, and with his sons, with you, and will all people and creatures who will live on the earth. Never again will the earth be destroyed by water. This promise is attached to the sign of the rainbow.

And you, friend, have this sign especially for you in your Baptism. For there, you were already drowned. You drowned and died with Christ, along with all sins and evil lusts in the flood of Holy Baptism. And you were raised to life there. For in those floodwaters you journeyed with

Christ in the ark of His body. You entered the flood with Him in your Baptism. You died with Him at the cross. You were buried with Him in His tomb. And you rose with Him.

Your Baptism is your rainbow. It is a beautiful sign for you that God will never become angry at you. Why not? He has forgiven you in Christ. He does not count your sins against you. It was the ark that took a beating in the Flood. Noah and his family were safe within it. The ark was pummeled with the rains from heaven. The ark was beaten by the waves of the sea. The ark was bruised and battered, but inside the ark, Noah and his family were safe.

Christ is your ark. On the cross He was pummeled with the rain of God's wrath from heaven. Jesus was beaten by the waves of the mob in Pilates' court. He was bruised and battered for you because of your sin and mine. But your Baptism places you in Christ. You are safe there within your ark.

Look at the shape of a rainbow. The shape is described by the last three letters: b...o...w. Bow. A rainbow is an arc. It's curved in the shape of a bow. In those days a bow was used in war. An archer could inflict serious damage on his enemy by sending a volley of arrows by means of his bow. But the rainbow is not a sign of war, even though it is in the shape of a bow. It's a sign of peace. Every rainbow that you have ever seen, which way is it curved? Is it bowed against the earth so that, it appears as if God, in anger, may send arrow after arrow into us? No. It arcs into the heavens away from the earth. It is not a sign of wrath and punishment, but a sign of grace. And so with your Baptism, it is just such a sign of peace, God's peace, for you.

And if you peer closely at the outermost color of a rainbow, which one do you see? Not green, or blue, or purple...red. The color of the rainbow on the outside of the arc; the color that is nearest to the heavens; the color which first meets the gaze of God when He looks at the bow...is red. Is this not a reminder to Him that the blood of His Son was shed for every sinner on earth; shed also for you? The blood of Jesus is not just a sign for us; it is for God also. It "*speaks better than the blood of Abel.*" God acts in mercy because of Jesus' blood. On account of His blood, which was shed for all, God has declared every sinner forgiven. He has declared you forgiven. And the rainbow, by its beautiful color, is a sign and reminder of this truth.

I don't know what color Noah's ark was...maybe brown. Yours is red. Christ is your ark. And His blood is painted all around you. As you journey through life, therefore, you are safe. Safe from the power of sin. Safe from the angry waves of the wicked world. Safe from the rain of God's wrath. Those who live outside the ark are not safe. So do not join with them. Do not be led away from Christ your ark; away from the hearing of His words; away from His Table of Grace. Out there, no one is safe. But in Christ your ark, nothing can hurt you. Your journey with Him is secure. Follow the rainbow. Not to a pot of gold. Follow this sign of God back to His word of promise.

In heaven we will no longer need the rainbow. But here we do, and God gives it to us. Here you have the rainbow, you are blessed with Baptism, you have Christ as your ark. Your journey will, therefore, land you on the other side of the rainbow where you will meet the loving gaze of God face to face. Amen.