

Genesis 6:1-22  
First Sunday in Advent  
Our Savior Comes  
...Bringing Judgment and Grace

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When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup>the sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are mortal; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

<sup>4</sup>The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

<sup>5</sup>The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup>The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

<sup>9</sup>This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. <sup>10</sup>Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup>Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup>God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. <sup>13</sup>So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. <sup>14</sup>So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. <sup>15</sup>This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. <sup>16</sup>Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. <sup>17</sup>I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. <sup>18</sup>But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. <sup>19</sup>You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. <sup>20</sup>Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. <sup>21</sup>You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

<sup>22</sup>Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

“Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head. The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.” I think you’re all rather familiar with that song, aren’t you. It’s been around for over a century now. It has become an extraordinarily popular Christmas carol which has been published in hymnals and songbooks in almost every church body in America and around the world. Add to that the fact that it’s three short verses have been set to such simple melodies so that it’s one of the easiest for children to memorize and you could start to make the argument that it’s one of the best Christmas songs out there.

I’ll let you in a little secret though, I’m not a huge fan of *Away in a Manger*. It’s cute, it’s

idyllic, it brings images of the nativity scene floating into your mind, but aside from the last line of the song, “and take us to heaven to live with you there,” it doesn’t do a whole lot to convey what the real significance of Christmas is. I think that’s typical of a much larger trend that we see taking place in our Western world when it comes to the celebration of Christmas. There’s no mistaking the fact Jesus and His mission have slowly but surely become less and less a part of Christmas celebrations over the years. But even within the church, we need to make sure that we don’t water Christmas down to nothing more than a sweet little baby lying in a straw filled manger in a stable. The real focus of Christmas, as we’ll see very clearly in just a few weeks, is our heavenly Father acting in pure grace by sending His Son into this world to rescue sinful human beings like you and I from the devastating punishment that we deserve because of our sins. One could easily look at a manger scene and say, “This is the true meaning of Christmas, without fully understanding that the reason that baby is lying in the manger is because He came to die on a cross three decades later. And the reason He died on the cross was to offer salvation to you and to me when He comes again on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead.

There’s another account from God’s Holy Scriptures that I think suffers a similar threat of being idealized and “cutesified” at the risk of losing sight of the main message God intended for it to communicate to us; that’s account of Noah, his ark, and the flood. Today you’d be hard pressed to find a family in America that doesn’t know about Noah and the Ark, but the extreme significance of this historical event has been so watered down that for many today it’s no more than a pleasant theme for a nursery room or for children’s toys and it’s significance doesn’t seem to be much more than an opportunity to teach children the names of all the cute little “elephants and kangaroosies” that Noah had along with him on the ark. Today, as we look at the first of four chapters where God tells us about Noah and the ark and the flood we’ll see the message behind those events that took place is really the same as the message of Christmas. It’s all about the Savior who was coming to bring judgment and grace.

We’re pretty familiar with the first three chapters of Genesis where God had Moses give us the account of Creation, the fall into sin, and the first Gospel promise that the seed of the woman would reconcile man to God by crushing Satan’s head. Chapters 4 and 5 tell us about Cain and Abel and the birth of another son to Adam and Eve who was named Seth, and then they show the two directions that humanity went from there. Seth and his descendants began a lifestyle of worship. We’re told they called on the name of the LORD and that they walked with God. Cain and his descendants, however, forsook the LORD and lived for their own pleasure and to glorify themselves. A millennium and a half went by and you would hope that those children of God who called on His name and walked with Him would have continued passing their faith in that promised Savior along but that’s not exactly the picture we get as we arrive at Genesis 6.

**When human beings began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God (the believers) saw that the daughters of humans (the unbelievers) were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with humans forever, for they are corrupt; their days will be a hundred and twenty years.” The Nephilim (which is a Hebrew word for tyrants) were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.**

So the believers had slowly but surely strayed away from their faith in their Creator and Savior God choosing instead to gratify their sinful human desires. And we still see today, once the First Commandment goes out the window it doesn’t take long for the rest to follow. **The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, the earth was corrupt in God’s**

**sight and was full of violence.... for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways and every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.**

So God came up with a plan—and this is the part that doesn't typically make it into the mobiles over the cribs or the nursery room wallpaper—here is what our compassionate and gracious LORD who is slow to anger and abounding in love said, **I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.**

Not exactly the beginning we imagine for the pleasant little children's story we sometimes make it out to be. But this is where we're introduced to a new character, Noah. God has just announced that He regrets having created the human race, except, we're told, for Noah. **Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.** Moses goes on to tell us that **Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and [that] he walked faithfully with God.** That's the first time the word "righteous" appears in the Bible and it's one that often gets misunderstood. Moses sheds a little more light on it a few chapters later when he tells us **Abraham believed the LORD and He credited it to Him as righteousness** (Gen 15:6) and the author of Hebrews gives us even more insight in his "heroes of faith" chapter when he tells us **By his faith... [Noah] became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith** (Heb 11:7). Noah's righteousness, then, was something God credited to Him because of His faith in that promised "Seed of the woman" who would save His people from their sins. That promise was the core of God's plan for fallen mankind and so in order to protect that promise and to see it fulfilled He sent a flood to eradicate the world of the sinful men who threatened to choke and smother to death the faith of the last little remnant of believers on earth.

Maybe there is a reason then to hang pictures of Noah and his ark on the wall of our little ones' bedrooms because that ark, which God used to save Noah and his family from the devastation of His judgment on sinful mankind is one of the richest pictures we have in the Bible of God's redeeming grace. Not only did God use the ark to keep Noah and His family and all those animals alive, He used it to keep His promise of salvation alive. As awful and devastating as the flood was it was, at the same time, truly the act of our gracious and compassionate LORD.

I would make one recommendation though; if you or your children want to decorate nurseries with scenes from Noah's ark that's great, but I would also include in the décor of that room, some kind of reminder of that child's baptism—the flood of water that God used to save them from the devastation of His judgment on this sinful world. Baptism is where we start to find out what Noah and the flood really mean for us.

In some ways, not a lot has changed since the time of Noah. On the one hand, that sorry description of humanity that we heard in verse five, **that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time**, is still true today. Every human being is born with a naturally sinful heart that we can trace back through our ancestors to Noah and back from him to Adam. On the other hand, God's plan to save our sinful human race has not changed either. What has changed is that the promise Noah believed in has been realized in Jesus. Today, God makes you heirs of His righteousness not through faith in the promise of what is coming, but through faith in what He accomplished 2000 years ago through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

God connects us to the saving work of Jesus with the sacrament of Holy Baptism. He connects us to Jesus' life and death, His burial and resurrection by placing His name upon us and washing our

sins away. In our epistle lesson this morning (1 Peter 3:18-22) the Apostle Peter draws the connection for us between the waters of the Flood and the water of Baptism. He says the ark saved a few people, eight in all, through water and that symbolizes the waters of Baptism which now save you also by the resurrection of Jesus.

The account of Noah and the ark is incredibly important for us today because the message that was being preached by God through Noah in the days leading up to the flood is the same message He is preaching to us through His Word today: I will not contend with the sinful world forever. The days of men on this earth are numbered. Judgment is coming.

It's tempting to look at something as terrifyingly devastating as the flood or the other acts of God's judgement that we read of in the Old Testament and think there's no way that's ever going to happen to me. There is a temptation to view the pleasures this world as "worth" whatever we may forfeit in the life to come by pursuing them rather than remaining faithful to God and His plan for our salvation. It is not worth it. God's judgment is coming.

Jesus Himself compared the judgment of the flood to the judgment of the Last Day, in Matthew 24 He says, **As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man** (Mt 24:37-39). But just as God provided safety for Noah and his family on the ark, He has provided an ark for us as well. That ark, is Jesus. In Jesus, there is now no condemnation for you or for me because He has set us free from sin and death (Rom 8:1-2). Jesus has brought us safely into the ark that is Himself through Baptism and the saving message of His gospel, so where does that leave us now? We heard our Savior's warning words in our Gospel lesson this morning (Mark 12:32-37), **Be on guard, be alert! You do not know when the time [of judgment] will come. What I say to you I say to everyone, "Watch!"**

When God decided to send the flood, He gave the world 120 years of grace to repent of their sins and place their trust in Him for salvation. Human beings today have a time of grace as well. For those of us who have learned of His grace and are safe in the ark of His Church, He cautions us to stay on our guard during that time so that Satan can't lull us to sleep or get us to jump ship and go swimming after the cheap pleasures and thrills this world promises to offer.

At the same time, God also uses us, just like He used Noah to testify to the people around us of both His grace and judgment. St. Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet 2:5). We don't have any sermons recorded that Noah preached in those years while he was building the ark, I have no doubt that he spoke to his neighbors and his relatives and friends urging them to turn from their lives of sin and to place their trust in God, but as he built that ark his life itself was a pretty powerful sermon.

His plumb-line and his level, his hammer and his saw, demonstrated both His holy fear of God's judgment and His trust in God's saving grace. What is my plumb-line? What is your hammer? What are the simple tasks that God has set before us which, as we carry them out in faithful service to our Lord, will testify to His grace and judgment?

Noah, the flood, and the ark. They're far more than a cute little story that makes for good wallpaper, decorations, and children's toys. They're a part of the grand story of God's plan of saving grace for His people. Watch as we look forward to our celebration of our Savior's first coming. Be on your guard as we look beyond that to His second coming and may God keep you safely in the ark of His Church, the body of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.