

## Genesis 8

**8:1** But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; **2** the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, **3** and the waters receded from the earth continually. At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated; **4** and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. **5** And the waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains were seen.

“God remembered Noah...” We do pray in our church that God will remember us in His kingdom. To be totally forgotten by God is a fate worse than death, for it means non-existence. We also pray that He eternally remember those who have died. We pray that God will remember us but that he will not remember our sins (Psalm 25:7, Isaiah 43:18, 64:9).

“God remembered Noah...” Here is a trivia question: In which Orthodox Sacrament is Noah and the ark explicitly mentioned? Here is the quote from the service: “Preserve them, O Lord our God, as You preserved Noah in the ark.” It is in the Wedding Service of Crowning that we remember and invoke Noah and the ark as we ask God to bless the couple being united in marriage. One may wonder about the connection of Noah to marriage – he was married but his wife’s name is not even mentioned and she plays absolutely no role in the story other than being one of those preserved by God in the ark. She is not known to have given birth to children after the flood so it is really her sons which preserve humanity and repopulate the earth. So does the wedding service imply that marriage is like a devastating storm and flood? The imagery of Noah is invoked purely as someone whom God preserved from evil and destruction which is what we pray He will do for the newlywed. The wedding service in Orthodoxy is very cognizant of the fact that life sometimes throws at every married couple as well as at each of us devastating contingencies. Marriage cannot protect us from these life threatening problems and sudden disasters – only God can help us when one of life’s tidal waves overwhelms us.

Noah is also mentioned in the Service of the Great Blessing of Water, where we might more expect to find his name: “For You are our God, who through water and the Spirit, have renewed our nature grown old through sin. You are our God, who with water drowned sin in the days of Noah.”

“God remembered Noah...” Was there ever a danger that God who had ordered Noah to build the ark and had him work on it for 100 years and had him take his family and the various species of animals into it, might forget about Noah? Does the story suggest that God was tempted with simply letting the chaos overwhelm the cosmos? Or that the destructive forces of the

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cataclysm were so appeasing His anger with humanity that it was lulling God to sleep with indifference towards His creatures? The God whose heart was pained by humanity still has room in His heart for the righteous Noah. Whether God “snapped back” to remembrance or whether he remembered Noah all along, when He thinks about one righteous human God is moved to save that person.

Chrysostom tells his flock not to overly think about or try to rationally approach the story which surpasses our credulity. Questioning the literal facts and doubting their veracity obviously occurred to the Christians of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century. Such questions of faith are not just the result of secular humanism and science. He acknowledges that the story does not tell us how the humans and animals could have survived being shut up in a big box for so many days. He acknowledges drinking water would have been a problem, the unbearable stench would have done them all in, the wild animals would not have reacted peaceably to being housed in the bowels of the ark as this is totally unnatural to them and many don't do well in captivity. He advises his faithful not to focus on the literal details but rather to consider the faith of Noah and Noah's virtuous obedience to God which is what he says the story is mostly about. He admits the facts of the story- what literally happened - remain a secret of God. Chrysostom then argues that since we know the loving nature of our God we simply have to trust Him in His revelation. The story, St. John concludes, teaches us to persevere in obeying God no matter what conditions we have to live under.

The story teaches us that doing God's will and even God's salvation might require patience and suffering on our part as it did Noah. That is something we modern people find hard to accept. We want instant success, not a long protracted struggle. Yet as any farmer/gardener knows there are many potential threats and disasters from planting until harvest, and one has to meet them all if one has any hope of having a harvest. Even if one does everything just right, the harvest might be ruined by events beyond one's control. For Christians the real harvest though does not occur in this world, but in the world to come. The suffering and problems here, bad as they are, are nothing

compared to the harvest which awaits the faithful in God's kingdom.

“God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided” On the first day of creation in Genesis 1:2, God's Spirit/wind (the Hebrew word *ruah* is the same one word used in Genesis to mean wind, breath, Spirit) hovered over the waters of the depths. So once again God's wind/Spirit blows over the waters and restrains and contains them and imposes God's will and order on them. The renewed and purified creation is about to emerge again from the primordial waters of chaos.

“the fountains of the deep ... were closed..” The same abyss which existed at the beginning when God imposed order on the chaos (Gen 1:2), which then burst forth to cause the deluge (7:11), now are closed once again.

“...the waters receded from the earth...” Where did all these waters go? According to Genesis 7:19 covered the entire earth to a depth of 15 cubits (approximately 22.5 feet) above the highest mountain peaks. This would have created quite a problem for draining it off as there would have been no place for it to drain. Chrysostom acknowledges in his own sermons that the story stretches credibility, but asks his flock to accept that there is some kind of mystery here which is beyond human understanding, and again says the story is really about faith and our willingness to follow God to the depths of the earth or to the heights as the case may be. Chrysostom is at a loss for how to account for the story because he does accept it as somehow literally true even though not always reasonable. He appeals to the fact that there are secrets or mysteries of God that we will never be able to understand so we should move beyond the physical details and allow the story to shape our faith which is what it is supposed to do more than give us a history of the world. The story for him is ultimately about God's love for the world and how we are to learn about this love by reading scriptures. In the end Chrysostom says the right response from us to these stories is thanksgiving to God for salvation.

“At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated...” Noah, family and animals would have been in the ark for 5 months when it hits the top of Ara'rat, if the P-Source

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story is literally true. They still have another 190 days left in the ark if one is following the details of the story (and the P-Source). They would have needed a huge quantity of food for this duration, not to mention a massive clean up job if that was possible. But if we don't get caught up in the literal details, we do see the story as a typology of salvation. God does what it takes to save His chosen ones. Humans are called upon to be faithful no matter in what conditions we find ourselves. In the end, God prevails as all is happening according to His will, even natural disasters are not outside of God's will, nor can they overcome God's protection for his chosen righteous remnant. Of course for us another lesson is that the Lord did not spare his favored ones from having to endure the suffering and deprivation caused by the nearly year long flood. The story only tells us that in the end – after enduring suffering, after being shut up in the ark (a coffin!) – God triumphs and rescues his faithful, raising them from the dead.

“At the end of a hundred and fifty days the waters had abated” When God first made creation, He divided the waters on one day to expose the dry land. The restoration of creation is carrying on for 5 months and then only the mountain tops appear. Is God less eager this time to allow the earth to be inhabited by humans? The Lord seems to be willing to take much more time to allow things to dry out and become habitable. There is no steady movement day by day – now time is dragging and God makes no comment about the goodness of His creation cleansed of violence and wickedness.

“in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month” This is exactly 150 days since the flood began on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the second month. Because of the Jewish writer is using the ancient perpetual solar calendar to reference the story scholars tell us that the story has the waters beginning to ebb and then the mountain tops first appearing on two different Wednesdays. Wednesday also happens to be the day when the Exodus from Egypt begins (Exodus 12:40-51, Numbers 33:3). The story places the ark coming to a rest on Ara'rat on a Friday (7<sup>th</sup> month, 17<sup>th</sup> day). Coincidentally on a Friday, the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross says, “It is finished” (John 19:30) Seventy three days after landing on Ara'rat the other mountain

tops become visible on a Wednesday, as already noted.

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**6** At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made, **7** and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. **8** Then he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; **9** but the dove found no place to set her foot, and she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put forth his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. **10** He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; **11** and the dove came back to him in the evening, and lo, in her mouth a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. **12** Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove; and she did not return to him any more.

No description is given of what life was like on the ark or how the humans and the wild animals could possibly have survived sharing the space of the big box for the year of the flood. But one might speculate. Is it possible that for the year in which the flood was devastating the earth, that humans and animals, lion and lamb, once again lived in peace together as they had in paradise? Is the lack of detail of their lives intentional, to somehow cause us to hearken back to the story of life in the Garden of Eden? Many ancient people in fact felt the entire created cosmos was a big box with the walls of the box keeping the chaos away from the inhabited earth. So the ark was a microcosm of the universe – outside the box the forces of the abyss raged, just as the ancients imagined their potential power raged in the place beyond the world where to God pushed them. The entire world was in a cataclysm, but in the ark there was peace and harmony – a miniature paradise. God may be raging at the wickedness outside the ark, but in the ark all are at peace with each and with God. Such imagery of the ark of salvation as a place of refuge and peace might not work so well if we overly literalize the story and have to deal with the harsh realities of what it would be like to live in a big box with a large number of animals for a year (One need only read the impossibilities which the crew of the ill-fated \$200 million Biosphere encountered, to realize what Noah and crew would have faced in the ark). However, the lack of any description of life in the ark suggests we are not to rationally think about the harsh living conditions the passengers would have experienced, but rather we are to accept their situation as living in another paradise. It suggests that one is supposed to imagine that the story is also symbolic, and when read figuratively it is full of beautiful and godly images as well as having a moral to it.

St. John Chrysostom makes an interesting reference to the raven who leaves the ark but doesn't come back but rather flies about continuously until the flood waters receded from the earth. He compares the raven (his text says crow) to people who show up at church for some special event but then are not interested in coming back to church on a regular basis. "They mimicked not Noah's dove, but the crow (raven), and this when the choppy waves and that storm still lingered and the surging waves were intensifying with each successive day, and this holy ark was in front of everyone's eyes and

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calling everyone and drawing them to herself, and providing considerable safety to those in flight. She beats off not attacks of waters or waves but the constant assaults of utterly irrational passions and removes envy and suppresses arrogance” (TCOTS, p 67). Chrysostom portrays the raven as refusing to return to the safety of the ark not because the storm prevents it, but because the raven is consumed by the passion of pride. He apparently thinks many people avoid regular church attendance because of the story of their own passions which they don't want to control, nor even have to acknowledge. His use of the raven to teach a lesson in human behavior and morality is typical of many Patristic writers who believe the Old Testament stories have many valuable lessons to teach. They were not constantly worried that the literal value of the story would be lost. For them the Scriptures are a continuous source of teaching, inspiration, correction and training in righteousness as 2 Timothy 3:16 says.

The story does not tell us exactly why Noah released the raven. A raven is considered an unclean animal in Judaism as it does eat carrion. The restless raven flies about and does not come back to the ark. The raven doubtlessly found plenty of carrion at which to peck. The grim message to Noah was that the flood waters are filled with corpses of humans and the carcasses of animals. Noah would then know the flood was as destructive as God had warned. When Noah next releases the dove he clearly does so “to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground.” The dove is able to convey a different message to Noah about the changing conditions of the flood each time it is released – by first returning, by bringing a fresh leaf from its second flight, and finally when it doesn't return at all. Interestingly, the dove is the only bird that was acceptable for sacrificial offerings in Jewish temple worship.

From the Prayer Blessing the Oil of the Catechumen at Baptism: “O Lord and Master, the God of our fathers, who sent unto them that were in the ark of Noah your dove, bearing it is beak a twig of the olive, the token of reconciliation and of salvation from the flood, the foreshadowing of the mystery of grace, and You provided the fruit of the olive for the fulfilling of Your holy mysteries... Bless also this holy oil...” In the blessing of the holy oil, we see that the

church does understand the story of Noah and the ark to have symbolic value to it. It is in its conclusion a story of reconciliation between God and humans. Note also the emphasis in this prayer that the story is about salvation from the deadly, destructive powers of the flood. The prayer does not see the drowning of the wicked as the point of the flood story, but rather focuses on how God saves the righteous from destruction. The implication is clear – there may be a final judgment day, and the prospect of eternal punishment, but God saves those who love Him from this reality. Those Christians, who are quick to pronounce God's judgment on sinners, forget the Gospel is Good News – God saves us from eternal punishment and destroys death. It is not God's hope that any humans spend an eternity in hell; rather He rescues us from such a fate. “The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for his heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18).

“At the end of 40 days...” If we accept the Source Theory, the 40 day flood belongs to the J-Source. In this story, Noah enters the ark 7 days before the flood begins, the flood lasts 40 days, and then Noah releases the raven and seemingly the dove for the first time— his 47<sup>th</sup> day in the ark. He waits 7 days and releases the dove a second time, and 7 days later he disembarks as the flood is over. In the J-Source Noah and crew are in the ark 61 days, 54 of them while the flood waters were rising and then receding. If we don't accept the Source Theory notion of 2 distinct stories intertwined, it is a little more difficult to establish the time line of the flood. How does the 40 days of 8:6 match up with the 150 days of 8:1-5? The P-source has Noah in the ark for a total of 340 days, nearly an entire year. What part of that total the 40 days represents cannot be easily established. Harmonizing the details of the two stories, if that is what we believe must occur for the Bible to be considered “true,” is sometimes difficult. It becomes fodder for those who ridicule the literal inconsistencies of the Bible. Source Theory in this case can help unravel the problem and show the significance of the story is not in its literal details but in its prophetic message and in the moral to the story. We accept the fact that our Scriptures do in fact contain several versions of the same story – this is the result of God inspiring a community, an entire people, to remember His story. There is much that God wants us to understand through His revelation and obviously He thinks we will best grasp His

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purpose by giving us more than one version of a story so that we can get beyond the literal details into the depth of His intended message.

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**13** In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from off the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold, the face of the ground was dry.

**14** In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. **15** Then God said to Noah, **16** "Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. **17** Bring forth with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh--birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth--that they may breed abundantly on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." **18** So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. **19** And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark.

"In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month" Using the perpetual solar calendar of the ancient world the Jewish writer of Genesis tells us that Noah discovers the dry ground precisely on a Wednesday which happens to be New Year's Day, the first day of the newly cleansed and restored creation. Much later in Jewish history, New Year's Day will also be the same day of the year on which the tent of the sanctuary was consecrated by Moses, which marks another new first day for God's people (Exodus 40:2). In the P-Source, Noah removes the covering of the ark precisely 60 days after the other mountain tops became visible to Noah when the ark struck ground on Ara'rat. In verse :14 the earth is finally dry on a Wednesday, 57 days after the waters had abated. According to the P-Source story, exactly 340 days after Noah, et al, entered the ark, they are commanded by God to disembark and go into all the world. The departure from the ark and processing into the world may be what the Evangelist Mark had in mind when he reports Jesus, after the resurrection, commanding His disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). As all of creation experienced salvation and a resurrection from death when Noah, his family and the animals emerged from the ark, so too after the resurrection, the apostles are commanded to preach the good news to the entire creation – not just to humans, but to all living beings.

"Noah removed the covering of the ark..." This text suggests that Noah and his fellow ark passengers have been below deck, kept in the dark for some 283 days. Perhaps the text is hinting back to the beginning of creation when God said, "Let there be light." For the first time in over ten months Noah is able to see both the light and God's earth again. Noah may be the first human to see a sight similar to Genesis 1:9-10 on the third day of creation when it was God who saw the goodness of the dry land and named it "earth." This also happened on a Wednesday, the first Wednesday of the world's existence as described in Genesis 1.

While God Himself protectively shut Noah in the ark (7:16), Noah has to remove the covering himself to get out of the ark. Was there some reticence on God's part to let them out? Does God want Noah and all of us to understand He is not going to do for us what we are capable of

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doing for ourselves? It calls to mind Exodus 14:15 when God confronts Moses for whining about their situation: "Why do you cry to me? You tell the people what they need to do."

It is God not Noah who takes the initiative in having the humans and the animals disembark to repopulate His restored world newly cleansed of sin. God sends Noah and family out of their little paradise (back) into the world. The God who had shut them into the ark and cut them off from the world returns them to the world from which they had been taken. If we remember that the word "ark" actually can mean a "coffin" we have in this scene a prefiguring of the resurrection with the saved people returning to life in the redeemed creation.

Chrysostom says the story of the flood is to remind us that there is a God and there will be a Judgment Day. It is a warning to us to spare us from suffering. "What could be worse than this stupidity if, though hearing every day about the judgment and the kingdom, we imitate those living in the time of Noah, and the people in Sodom, waiting to learn everything by experience? Yet it was for this reason that all those events were preserved in writing, that if one would be incredulous with regard to things to come he might receive, from things that have already occurred, a clear assurance of the future." (HOMILIES ON ST. JOHN 1-47, p. 384) In other words, are we so stubborn and stupid that we will have to wait until we stand before the Judgment seat before we will believe it is happening? God, after all, has tried to warn us! For Chrysostom the story of Noah and the flood is most important because it is a prototype story, a prophecy of what is to come and it should warn us to be prepared for the coming judgment of God.

Some who question the literal value of the story ask how it was possible for Noah to travel the earth and collect species of all the animals. He would have had to travel throughout the entire world including the arctic, Antarctic, North and South America (of which the Bible never once even acknowledges its existence. Remember in 1492 Columbus discovered a "new world", one previously unknown to Jews and Christians). He would have to have been able to build the ark while simultaneously hunting all the species of the animals throughout the world – the bible never mentions his absence from the ark

building project while traveling the world. He would have had to somehow keep the animals and tend to them while the ark was being built over the 100 year period which the story says he had to build the ark. And then after the flood he would have had to get all these animals back to their proper habitats in every direction at the same time. While all things are possible for God, Noah still had to operate within the laws of physics and the technology of his day. The story stretches the limits of credulity which is why St. John Chrysostom warned his flock not to be overly rational about the story, but rather to look to the story for its spiritual lessons. The story is a prototypical story about a fallen world awash in sin and a God who continues to work to save some of His creation. God saves even animals in the story not just His favored human beings. He saves the animals because they are supposed to serve humans. The story argues that even when God is totally angry at us, when He is totally grieved by our sins and regrets having brought us into being, that His love trumps His anger, grief, regrets and judgment; He salvages His creation despite how evil humans can be. There still is no mention of Satan in the Genesis story and nowhere does it blame Satan for the evil that humans do. God has no opposite and equal. The LORD is sovereign and all powerful and He is in constant warfare with the powers of darkness and chaos which want to overwhelm the earth. But even these powers, such as the abyss, must obey God and accomplish God's will. Neither chaos, the abyss, nor evil are more powerful than the Lord God, nor do they have any rights over human beings. Even when God uses the abyss to carry out His will, He still does not allow the abyss to totally overwhelm His creatures. God provides and saves some even from the forces He is using for judgment. The story is advocating for the goodness of God as Savior.

In the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> Century, St. Justin the Martyr (d.165) wrote the following comments on Noah. He follows in the footsteps of St. Peter in his Epistle who looked beyond the literal reading of the story to its meaning as a prototype of baptism (1 Peter 3). St. Justin wrote, "At the flood the mystery of the world's salvation was at work. The just man Noah, together with the other flood personages, namely, his wife, his three sons and their wives, made eight in number thereby symbolizing the eighth day on which our Christ was raised from the dead, that day being always implicitly the first, Christ, the

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first born of all creation, has become in a new sense the head of another race, regenerated by Him, through water, through faith, and through the wood which contained the mystery of the cross, just as Noah was saved through the wood of the Ark, carried by the waters of the flood... And I mean here those who receive preparation through water, faith, and wood escape the judgment of God that is to come." For St. Justin the story of the flood is a prototypical story that lays down a pattern of how God works so that we can recognize the work of God in Christ. Noah is saved from death as Christ is and becomes the first new man of the new creation just as Christ is the new Adam and creates in us a new human race which lives not by the flesh but by the Spirit of God. For St. Justin the full meaning of the Noah story cannot be fathomed until one understands Christ – only in seeing the fulfillment of the typology does one recognize the prophetic significance of the story.

"So Noah went forth, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. And every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves upon the earth, went forth by families out of the ark." There is no wild rush or chaotic stampede of "cabin fevered" animals to flee the confines of the ark. What we have described here is a very orderly, solemn procession with each family of animals waiting their turn to join the recession from the ark. Rather like a well organized Paschal procession emerging from the church building, the ark's passengers emerge each walking with their own kind from the ark which was their tomb into a world cleansed of sin. With reverence they disembark to enjoy their freedom, going out into the world to celebrate salvation – God's triumph over sin and death. This is exactly what we experience each Paschal midnight when we process out of the church into the creation renewed by Christ's resurrection from the dead and the ultimate victory over sin and death.

The story of Noah and the ark is used by our Lord Jesus Christ as a prophetic story to prepare those of us still alive on earth to be prepared for the coming judgment of God. It is exactly what use we are to make of the story of the flood, As it says in Deuteronomy 32:29: "This nation has no sense whatever, they lack all discernment all sense were they wise they would realize what happened and learn for the future" (New Skete Translation). We are to

use the story of Noah and the ark to learn about the future. If we turn the lesson of the ark into a test case for biblical literalism, we end up lacking discernment and learning nothing from the story to help us deal with the coming yet future Judgment of God.

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**20** Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

**21** And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. **22** While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease."

Though in the previous verse, 8:19, the animals follow Noah out of the ark in something like a Paschal Procession, the solemn assembly does not end in an agape celebration for the animals who survived the flood. Rather Noah will slaughter a great number of the animals which so calmly followed his lead and accepted his dominion throughout the flood. The new world onto which the ark's former inhabitants step apparently also has a new set of relationships. The humans are going to exercise their dominion over all other creatures and use the animals as a means to approach and worship God. Humans, who were created by God to be an intermediary between God and the rest of creation in Genesis 1, now will use animals in sacrifice as an intermediary between themselves and the Lord God. This situation of animal sacrifice for the people chosen by God to be His light to the nations will continue until the sacrificial death of God's Son on the cross brings an end to such practice as a way to please or appease God. God will choose death, the sacrifice of His own Son, as the means to end humans using the blood of animals as their intermediary with God. "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ... Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. ... But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:15-26). The coming of the Son of God into the world brings an end to animal sacrifice and restores humanity's relationship to God. Humans originally were to be mediators between God and the rest of creation. The human dominion over animals was to be demonstrated by the humans standing before God as the mediators for the entire created order. Animal sacrifice overturned the original order established by God and unnaturally placed the animals between God and humans! The animals in some fashion became the intermediary to appease God. In the incarnate Christ, once again humanity has the role of mediator between God and creation; human life and action now are what put us right with God.

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At the proskomedia (when the priest prepares the bread to be offered and sanctified in the Liturgy which follows), the Christian understanding of the Eucharist is presented in prayer by the celebrant: "Sacrificed in the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world for the life of the world and for its salvation." No longer does a flood cleanse the world of sin; no longer will animal sacrifice purify the flesh or the soul. Now the sin and wickedness of the world is taken away by Jesus Christ, who is the first fully human person, and thus can serve as microcosm and mediator and priest.

Noah builds an altar and offers worship to God "for the whole world" as we pray in the Anaphora. In St. Basil's Liturgy the priest in the Offertory Prayer says, "Look down on us, O God, and behold this our service. Receive it as You did the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron, and the peace-offerings of Samuel." We ask God to look down on our feeble efforts to worship Him, and to remember the worship of His chosen servants that pleased Him. Not only do we remember all that God has done for us (**anamnesis**), we want God to remember, when viewing our worship, those humans who pleased Him!

We are not told whether Noah is making a thanksgiving or peace offering or making propitiation for the sins of the world. Any one of those offerings might be appropriate. God has not commanded any sacrifice be offered, but perhaps Noah is taking no chances and wants either to thank God for saving him or to appease God so that there will be no more devastation. Noah doesn't say a word, remaining as silent as he has for his entire life.

"took of every clean animal and ... bird... and offered burnt offerings..." God has not commanded animal sacrifice, so what possesses Noah to offer it? He preserved the life of all these animals for a year in the ark only to kill them now. The image of Noah living in some paradisiacal peace with the animals as companions in the ark is suddenly shattered by Noah slaughtering them. Some have argued that humans by nature are to be priests and kings, so that sacrificial worship is natural to humans. At worship is when we are most human in this line of thinking. However so far in the text there was only one other instance of animal sacrificial worship and that was

immediately followed by the murder of Abel! Nevertheless most commentators feel God was pleased and appeased by the sacrifice whether it had been commanded by God or initiated by Noah. Throughout the Temple period of Judaism the main form of worship for Israel involved animal sacrifice. Somewhere near 70AD the Romans completely destroy the temple in Jerusalem and the city itself, and then Jewish animal sacrifice and the sacrificial priesthood came to an end. Judaism survived the destruction of the temple as rabbinic Judaism with its emphasis on the Torah was on the ascendancy at the very time Jerusalem was destroyed. Christianity is actually one form of rabbinic Judaism that comes from this time period. Christ Himself downplayed the Temple, but unlike Pharisaical Judaism with its emphasis on the Torah, Christ the Teacher asserts Himself – the incarnate Word of God and Messiah - as more important than the Torah and the Temple. Jesus claims His interpretation of the Torah is the revelation of God. Christianity for its part never practiced animal sacrifice always seeing Christ as the once and for all sacrifice that ended the need for any blood sacrifice.

"when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor..." Though generally it is thought God was pleased by the scent of the roasting meat (as the mention of Noah in the in St. Basil's Liturgy assumes), the story may have some ambiguity to it. For though God decides never to destroy humans again, it is precisely when He smells the burning sacrifice that He also remembers the human heart always inclines towards evil (8:21). The sacrifice has somehow reminded him of this awful truth.

"when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor..." The offering is a barbeque of each clean animal, and God appreciates the smell. The story suggests that the reconciliation between humans and God is accomplished. God is pleased once again with His human creatures. In what sense God can smell is unknown, but this is the first time in Genesis that this capacity is attributed to God. Orthodox to this day hope to please God and invoke His favor by burning incense in worship. Aaron was commanded to perpetually offer incense to the Lord (Exodus 30:8). In Orthodox services the censor and incense are blessed with the words, "Incense we offer to You, O Christ our God, as an odor of spiritual fragrance. Receive it upon Your

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heavenly altar, and send down upon us in return the grace of Your all-holy Spirit.” As we sing during the Lenten Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, “Let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice!” (Psalm 141:2) Noah’s offering incense is similar to the description of Aaron in Wisdom 18:21, “For a blameless man was quick to act as their champion; he brought forward the shield of his ministry, prayer and propitiation by incense; he withstood the anger and put an end to the disaster, showing that he was your servant.”

“...the LORD said in his heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of man...’” The last words about God’s heart in 6:6 were that God was totally grieved by humanity. Here God is at peace and makes a new resolve – He is convinced that He must learn to live at peace with the creatures whom He knowingly endowed with free will - His stubborn, troublesome and evil-doing humans. He promises not to let the humans provoke Him ever again to such wrath and destruction. The author of Genesis has God speaking to Himself not to Noah in making this promise. However, read Ezekiel 20 in which God describes at least 3 other occasions on which He wanted to pour His fury upon the house of Israel because of their sins and totally destroy them, yet decided against it. The notion of the faithful remnant whom God saves from the midst of an otherwise sinful humanity becomes a common theme in the Old Testament.

“the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” When all is said and done and flood waters have cleansed the earth of violence and wickedness, God expresses a realistic if depressing assessment of human beings - the human heart is still the source of evil in the world. Neither God nor the inspired scribes who wrote Genesis attributed the evil of the world to Satan. No amount of effort on God’s part to change the world can apparently bring about the change needed in the human heart. Humans did, do and will at times turn their hearts to the greatest of evils. For those who ask, “Why doesn’t God intervene in our world and change everything? Why does God let evil exist?” The answer from Genesis 6-9 is first because He continues to allow humans whose hearts constantly imagine evil to exist. Second, God did intervene once and it was an abysmal failure

– for He wiped out all the wicked, but wickedness remains in the human heart. As long as there are humans, evil has a source and a home – our hearts. God wants humans to exist, and so He knows this means evil will exist as well. As long as humans have free will, the potential toward evil must be real and possible or humans are not free. God created humans not automatons. He created beings that He wanted to CHOSE the good. But to do this, He had to give them real and meaningful and dangerous choice. To have the power to choose the good, we must have the power to choose the evil. This also is the only way in which human love is possible. God is love. He created us in His image and likeness. We are capable of love, which means we must be able to choose in order to really love (otherwise it isn’t love it is reactive instinct). The flood story reaffirms what we learned in Genesis 3 about human beings and the reality and risks of free will and love. Even the flood which cleanses the world of wickedness cannot take away free will, love, choice and the potential for evil from human beings. And God comes to accept that love also means for Him unconditionally loving humans as they are – faults and sin and all. God’s love is not a reaction to us (and our God-likeness and our God-given goodness); God’s love is how He chooses to act towards us before we even existed and despite how we behave. God experiences that true love means pain and risk and rejection. And despite all the sinful, wicked and evil faults of humans, God so loves the world that He will send His only Son to save the world. This is true love. When in the Gospel Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, to love beyond those who love us, He is asking us to love as God realized love demanded Him to love – even those who reject Him and do not love Him back. God doesn’t ask more of us than He is willing to do. But He does ask us to do what He does. Jesus taught, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ... You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:44-48).

Noah is the prototype of the man who is to reconcile the fallen world to a holy God. In Ezekiel 14, God is so displeased with the House

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of Israel that He declares that even if Noah was with them and interceding for Israel, He would not spare them from His pending wrath.

“for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth” In Genesis 6:5-6, it is because God realizes that the human heart imagines evil constantly that He become grieved over having created the humans. But after having destroyed His creation in order to rid the earth of sin, God is suddenly pleased with the incense offering of Noah, and appears to remember what He so valued in His creatures when He first looked upon them and saw them as “very good” (Genesis 1:31). The human is capable of doing something pleasing to God, and even if that something is very small – creating scented smoke – it removes from God His grief stricken desire to eliminate humans from the earth.

“...never again...” The Lord's promise to never again destroy all life may also indicate God will no longer judge humanity as one whole but will treat each person as they deserve based on their own life choices. The promise is unconditional – no matter how wicked humans continue to be God says He will not again curse and totally destroy the earth because of the evil humans do. This may well be the beginning of the notion of hell – a place for the torment and punishment of sinners which does not involve the destruction of the planet. While God's vow to never again destroy the earth and all the wicked on it may be a sign of His mercy, it also means that as long as the earth exists the wicked will always live alongside those who wish to follow God. If God was not able to eliminate the wickedness in humans through His divine punishments and great mercy, it seems that human efforts through correctional institutions, police, armies, legislation, courts and wars will also never bring an end to all evil either. There is no such thing as a war to end all wars! As long as there are humans in whose hearts evil incubates, there will be wickedness on earth. That is a reality we have to live with.

God promised to NEVER again destroy all humanity, and yet also speaks of a coming Judgment Day. What is holding God back? Why does he wait before visiting His final saving judgment on the people of earth? “Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of

perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming. The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12)