

# Rector's Letter - February 2011

## Great Gonerby Rectory

Dear Friends,

This year church folks are being encouraged to read through the 100 Essential Passages of the bible, and in support of this all our sermons are based around those passages. So, starting at the beginning of the Bible, the story of Noah comes up in Genesis chapter 6.

What do we make of this story? I suppose the first question is did the flood happen? Most scholars agree that there was a flood, but they disagree as to whether this was a local flood or a worldwide flood.

There is evidence of a local flood in the Mesopotamian basin which could have been the one mentioned in scripture (about the scale of the Australian floods in area). In which case Noah rescued local domestic and sacrificial animals to re-establish himself after this catastrophe. Proponents of this view also point out that there is insufficient water on Earth to flood the whole earth to a height of 7 metres above the highest mountains, as described in the Bible.

Proponents of the whole earth theory suggest that the flood itself changed the earth's topography which previously had fewer mountains! Even tectonic plates and continents were affected. Of course there is no way to approve or disapprove such a statement. However they also point out that fossils are found all around the planet and not just in one area. To create a fossil requires a dying animal to immediately be covered with silt and preserved before the bones can become dispersed. What could do this except catastrophic flooding? They also point out that ancient stories of a flood are found in histories of people all across the globe.

Well, I will leave you to make your own minds up. Whatever views we take the important question is -- what can the story teach us? I think these are the main points --

### 1. Sin -- and Judgment

We see, only a few chapters into the Bible how people decided to leave God's path and to go their own way. The Bible calls that decision sin, and in the Noah story we see how far from God sin will take us. (6:5) "the Lord saw how bad the people on earth were and that everything they thought and planned was evil." It's the nature of sin that it always gets worse. It grows like a cancer - left unchecked, sin will destroy us. So we can understand why God is so upset.

Some people think that God is waiting, just waiting to catch them doing something wrong, as if he enjoys punishing people. But it's interesting that his first emotion here is not satisfaction or even anger. Rather its pain and grief -- verse 6. "He was very sorry that he had made man..." - it broke his heart. That's what sin does to the heart of God - and as we've already seen with Adam and Eve, sin brings horrible consequences which eventually force God to act.

### 2. Faith

Yet all was not lost. There was one who had faith in God. Strong enough faith to believe him and obey him -- and to do a ridiculous thing and build this large boat. I would say this was impressive faith -- when everyone around him was mocking him -- for 120 years if we go by the biblical timescale.

God won't ask you to build a boat -- because he has promised not to flood the world again. But each Christian is required to walk by faith, when it's sometimes difficult and when those people of no faith, (or at least of faith in other things), make fun of you.

Noah is mentioned in the New Testament book of Hebrews -- in that big list of people who had great faith in God. Now those people were by no means perfect -- which you see in the story of Noah -- when later, he gets stone drunk. (But can you blame him - after a year locked in with his family !!)

But they were saved because of their faith. As we are -- as St Paul writes -- "God counts our faith as goodness". Jesus died for our sins so that our faith in him would save us.

### 3. A New Beginning

That's what we see at the end of the story. And when any person turns to Christ, & puts their faith, their life in his hands -- then it's like we too have a new start walking with God.

God Bless, *Revd. Peter.*