

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## All Aboard

Noah's Flood is one of those stories that is too good to throw away; at least, so thought the authors of the book of Genesis, who heard it in several different forms in the countries that lay around them. The idea of death by water is pretty archetypal; I've dreamt about it myself, in the days when I used to come home along the Trent bank as a child, and the river was sometimes within a few inches of flooding. Even we damp Northerners know the connection between life and water: it is only to be expected that we would have an inkling of the link between death and water as well. You're born in a flood, and you can perish in a flood; this should give quite an interesting feeling to anyone who is swimming, if they have time to remember; and it is a great idea for a sacrament. In Lent, we hear of four rivers that watered paradise, of the Red Sea that saved and slaughtered in one story, of the water that flowed from Ezekiel's Temple to purify the sea and heal the world, of the well of Jacob, of the spring of Siloam that rose in Sion, in which the blind man washed his anointed eyes; these teach us to see and understand the water flowing from the side of the dead Christ, and the water of Baptism that will be blessed on the night of Easter. And here, at the beginning of Lent, is Noah's Flood, to introduce the theme and to make it universal.

### The Meaning of the Rainbow

The rainbow is the sign that *God is never going to destroy the world by flood*. It therefore kicks into touch the theory that God ever *did* do such a deed (God, unlike us, does not change his ways!) So what we are left with is a brilliant story in which we see the fate of the human - and animal - families ventured on a raft, and surviving because of the hand of God's protection. The water is still a killer, but the people who are God's handiwork survive. That's the true pattern of Baptism, and of Easter. Underpinning the story is the theme of Covenant - the promise of God to be with us. God will *always* be with us, because whatever God is, he is *forever*. The rainbow is a symbol of that covenanted fidelity.

### Living the Covenant

You can only learn the Covenant by keeping it, trusting it, promising to be with God in response. This is a good way to understand the programme for Lent: the rebuilding of the covenanted relationship with God. The shorthand word for

"the loving-kindness of God" which forms his side of the covenant is the Hebrew *hesed*. The Greek writers translated this to their word *charis*, which becomes the Latin *caritas* (which we call *charity*) or the English *grace*. It all means the same thing: God has promised himself to us, and we can inherit our share in him, and be loved eternally and divinely. *What a prospect!*

### Test It Out

You can experience the Covenant by kicking away all the other supports you rely on. Do you look for security in your family? In your work? In your enjoyment of free time? By a pilgrimage into the wilderness, where these alternatives are distanced, you can put out your hand in search of God: not to "put God to the test", but to make your own faith. This is the Lenten discipline, and the Church does it together, so that we can find the faith which binds us together in one body - the body which will experience the Easter mystery - the joy of Resurrection.

### The Time Has Come

Let us not be onlookers to this sharing of life in Christ. Let us make Lent well, this year, fasting from what lulls us to sleep and blunts our understanding, and feeding on the gifts of heaven. In the Mass we are already powerfully united, welcomed to the fold of God. Let the body of Christ be formed anew in us.

*Fr Philip*