

One the great stories of the Bible is that of Noah and his Ark, a story of courage, endurance, of new beginnings and hope – and the story of God’s first covenant with humankind.

The story of the Flood comes to *us* through a Jewish retelling of the Flood myth told in Mesopotamia, quite possibly a Jewish retelling from the time of the exile in Babylon. So although it is in the first book of the Bible it was probably composed quite late along with the story of Creation. Those stories retold by Jews to affirm their belief in the one God who creates from nothing and who alone is God – in contrast to the Mesopotamian cult which had many gods who were fractious, falling out with each other and with humankind, and who when the flood comes and drowns most of humankind, we’re told

The gods were frightened by the flood and retreated up to the Anu heaven. They cowered like dogs lying by the outer wall.

Ishtar shrieked like a woman in childbirth.

The Mistress of the gods wailed that the old days had turned to clay because "I said evil things in the Assembly of the Gods, ordering a catastrophe to destroy my people who fill the sea like fish."

The other gods were weeping with her and sat sobbing with grief, their lips burning, parched with thirst.

A bit more dramatic than the Flood in the Old testament where the one God remains in control, wrathful but dignified, acting against sin, but protecting the righteous.

The story of the Flood is a great story – one of my Lenten treat each year is to listen to the recording of the Benjamin Britten setting of the Miracle Play, *Noyes Fludde* – it’s a very spirited, moving and quite short piece. You feel saved by the end. The story works when it helps us want to live better and put our trust in the one God.

We get another great story of salvation referenced in the second reading – another which echoes with ancient myths and legends – the story of Jesus descending to the dead and preaching to the spirits in prison and bringing them forth. Some of my favourite Easter images are of Jesus trampling down the doors of hell holding hands with Adam and Eve and all the patriarchs following close behind. Jesus as a more successful Orpheus. Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God, our Lord, our Saviour.

These great myths tells of truths, as the Collect of today puts it, the riches hidden in Christ, that we cannot contain in our histories and our science, that require poetry to do anything like justice to them. We do well to enter again in to the telling of them, listening to and thrilling at the legends, and all. Stories of a world gone bad but of healing, of humankind for ever losing its way, always contingent, always dependent on God, and God ever there loving, inviting, guiding....

There is something of the mythic about the gospel story of Jesus in the wilderness too, though in Mark we do not get all the dramatic details that Matthew and Luke give us. John doesn’t tell us anything about this time, these experiences in Jesus life. Mark does mention them, and as we noted last week draws on that wilderness imagery to help us recognise how Jesus was in a sense driven back into the wilderness and confronted with temptation and challenge even when, or maybe because, his ministry of miracles and mercy proved so successful.

All these stories that are more than history. They deal with deeper truths than *reportage* can. They bring colour and light and shape into that space which exists between the infinite glory of God and the creation which is not God and is finite and passing. They give us something to hold onto as we respond – and try to respond to – the way God invites us into his intimacy, invites human beings - and with us the whole of creation - invites us into his transcendence to share in, to be something more than what we are or of ourselves can ever know how to be.

One of the images of Easter is of the butterfly breaking out the chrysalis, opening its wings, allowing them to dry and then flying. The transformation of the grub, the caterpillar is extraordinary. Sorry to say this, folks but most of us are probably still at the grub stage – but God’s gift to us of faith calls us on to the glory of the butterfly.

Lent offers us the chance to take stock and wonder at how we are, what we are called to, and turn to the Lord who is ever ready to be with us for our next steps on the road.