

8. The Shipwrights' Play: The Building of the Ark

GOD:

When first I wrought this world so wide,
Wood and water, sea and sand,
Heaven and Hell I did not hide,
Yet herbs and grasses I began.
In endless bliss for to abide,
And in my likeness, I made man.
As lord and sire on every side
Of all the Earth, I made him then.

A woman also with him wrought I,
That they in law might lead their life.
I bade them grow and multiply,
And fill this world--but not with strife.
Since then they've wrought so woefully,
And sin is flourishing and rife.
I now repent, regretfully,
That ever I made man or wife.

For now they cause me to repent
My work, that I wrought well and true.
They all are disobedient,
And always bent more sin to brew.
But, for their sins they shall be rent,
And ruined wholly, through and
through.
No further word to them be sent.
I shall rework this work anew.

Anew I will this world be wrought,
Destroying all that dwells herein.
A flood upon them shall be brought
To waste the earth, and all within.
Except for Noah, I shall spare nought
Till all are sunk, and drowned for sin.
He and his sons, this is my thought,
Their wives also, their lives shall win.

Noah! My servant, steady and clean,
Because you are stable in virtues all,
I wish you to make-hear what I mean-
A work to save yourself withal.

NOAH:

Ah, mercy, Lord, what may this mean?

GOD:

I am the God of great and small.
I come to tell of trouble keen,
And of what marvel shall befall.

NOAH:

Ah, Lord, I love you, ever still,
That unto me-wretch unworthy-
Thus with your word, as is your will,
Deigns to appear thus wonderfully.

GOD:

Noah, as I bid you, thus fulfil.
A ship, I tell you, build on high.
Although you have but little skill,
Take it in hand, for help shall I.

NOAH:

Ah, worthy Lord, I beg, take heed-
I am too old, such things to start.
I cannot work a whole day's deed
Unless great need is, for my part.

GOD:

To do this work you must, indeed,
Or never escape from terrors smart.
I shall help you, and give you speed,
And give you health in mind and heart.

I see such war among man's kin,
That I will now my vengeance take.
They shall be sunken for their sin;
Therefore a ship I wish you to make.
You and your sons shall dwell therein;
They shall be saved, for your sake.
Therefore, boldly now, begin
Your measures and your marks to
make.

NOAH:

Ah Lord, your will shall ever be
wrought-
For so says every learned clerk-
But of ship-building know I nought.
Of their making I have no mark.

GOD:

Noah, I say, distress you not;
I shall guide you in all your work.
Unto the end I shall see it brought.
Therefore take heed to me, and hark.

Take high trees and cut them clean.
With square, not slanted ends, begin.
Make boards from them and battens
between,
Thus, properly, and not too thin.
Look that the seams be carefully seen
And nailed well; leave no gaps within.
Thus I design all that is seen.
Therefore, come now, leave off your din.

Five hundred feet it shall be long,
And eighty wide, all for your bliss.
The height, of fifty feet along.
Be careful to remember this.
I'll give you carefully, ere I gang,
Your measures, not to go amiss.
Be careful that you work not wrong.
I'll guide you sure; be sure of this.

NOAH:

Ah, blissful Lord, that all did build,
I thank you heartily, ever and ay!
Five hundred years I am, quite old;
I think those years as yesterday!
Full weak I was, and all unwell;
My weariness is gone away!
To work this work here in this field
All by myself, I shall assay!

To hew this board I will begin.
But first, I'll measure, end to end.
Now, it must be all equally thin,
So that it neither break nor bend.
Thus shall I join it with a pin,
And set it snugly with cement.
Thus shall I work, apprenticed in
The craft of God, the master hand.

[This work goes well, as I do feel.]
More subtly, no man can do.
It shall be clenched now, every deal,
With nails that are both fine and new;
Thus shall I fasten and bind the hull.
Put here a rivet, and there some glue-
With these, the bow I'll now work well.

This work, I warrant, is good and true.

Full true it is; now, be intent.
But fast my strength begins to fold.
Past me, a hundred winters went
Since I began this, most carefully told.
And in such travail thus to be bent
Is hard for him who is so old.
But He, who to me these messages
sent,
Will be my crutch; that makes me bold.

GOD:

Noah, this work is near an end,
And made as I had bid it be.
But in one way you must it mend;
Therefore, this lesson learn from me.
For diverse beasts must there be
penned,
And birds also, in their degree.
So they may not their species blend,
Diverse compartments there must be.

And when the ark is ordered so,
With separate stalls and cages here,
Of every kind you shall take two,
Both male and female together to fare.
Your wife, your sons with you shall go,
And also their wives, never fear.
These eight bodies, and no more,
Shall be saved in this manner here.

Therefore, my bidding now obey.
Till all be harboured, work you fast.
After the seventh day, it shall rain
Till forty days be fully past.
Take with you gear that may pertain
To man and beast, their lives to last.
I shall succour you, be certain,
Till all your care away is cast.

NOAH:

Ah, Lord, that every fault may mend,
To praise your wisdom I always will.
I thank you with both heart and hand
That you will save me from troubles ill.
And to this work now I must bend,
With beasts and birds my ship to fill.
Now, may the Master of this craft I tend
Guide all of us, with His good will.

9. The Fishers' and Mariners' Play: The Flood

NOAH:

Ah, Lord that lives eternal life,
I praise you ever with heart and hand,
Who allows me this, by reason rife,
Six hundred years to live on land.
Three seemly sons and a worthy wife
I have, always at my command.
But now my cares are keen as a knife,
Because I know your dread command.
There comes to each country,
Yes, cares both keen and cold.
For God has forewarned me
That the world shall wasted be.
And surely the truth I see,
As our forefathers told.

My father Lamech who, as one might
mention,
Here in this world a long time did wend,
Seven hundred years, seventy and
seven,
In such a space his time did spend.
He prayed to God, his voice faithful and
even,
That He to him a son should send-
And, at the last, there came from
Heaven
Such a promise that could greatly
amend,
And made him dig and delve
As ordered firmly before.
For he a son should have,
As he always did crave.
And, by the grace God gave,
In the world I then was born.

When I was born, "Noah" he named me,
And said these words with joyful mind:
"Behold," he said, "this one is he
Who shall be a comfort to all mankind."
Sirs, by this you all must see--
My father knew. By grace within,
By certain signs, he well could see
That all this world should sink for sin--
How God would vengeance take,
As certainly is seen,

And an end of those men make
Who would not sin forsake,
And how the rain should slake,
And a world grow once again.

I would to God it wasted were,
So that I should not have to toil.
My seemly sons! And daughters dear!
Now pay attention; listen well.

1 SON:

Father, we are all ready here,
Your bidding eagerly to fulfil.

NOAH:

Go call your mother, then come back
here
At once, that the flood may us not kill.

1 SON:

Father, we shall hear
Till your command is done.

NOAH:

All that lives everywhere
Shall, die now, my son, I fear.

1 SON:

Where are you, mother dear?
Come to my father, soon!

WIFE:

What say you, son?

1 SON:

Mother, indeed,
My father intends to flee from here.
He bids you come at once, with speed
To him, so nothing may you mar.

WIFE:

Yeah, son, get you back-take heed-
And tell him I will not come near.

1 SON:
Mother, I would do this deed,
But you must come, or worse it were.

WIFE:
Worse? How could that be?
We're speaking nonsense, son!

1 SON:
Mother, to you I say,
My father is going to flee!

WIFE:
Now, surely, I shall see
At once just what he means!

1 SON:
Father, I've done now as you command;
My mother comes to you this day.

NOAH:
She is welcome; for I understand
This world shall soon be washed away.

WIFE:
Where are you, Noah?

NOAH:
Right here at hand.
Come here, and quickly, I you pray.

WIFE:
Do you think that I'll leave the land
And get on that, in all this fray?
No, Noah, I am not bound
To float now over the hills.
Come, children; let's go into town.

NOAH:
No! Surely then you all will drown!

WIFE:
In faith, Noah, you'd best come down
And go do something else.

NOAH:
Wife, forty days are nearly past
And gone since it began to rain!
Alive no man shall longer last
But we alone; is that not plain?

WIFE:
Now, Noah, in faith, your wits are
waste;
This nonsense I'll not hear. In vain
You speak. You're mad; I am aghast.
Farewell; I'm going home again.

NOAH:
Oh, woman, are you mad?
My deeds you do not know;
All that has bone or blood
Shall be overflowed by the flood.

WIFE:
In faith, you were as good
My way to let me go.

Help! Oh, help!

NOAH:
What now? What cheer?

WIFE:
I'll go no nearer at any need.

NOAH:
Help, my sons, to hold her here,
For to her danger she takes no heed.

2 SON:
Be glad, mother, and amend your
cheer;
This world is drowned; now, have no
dread.

WIFE:
Alas, that I this word should hear.

NOAH:
You're killing us all; ill may you speed!

3 SON:
Dear mother, come with us.
There, nothing shall you grieve.

WIFE:
No; I must go home, I must,
My tasks are numerous.

NOAH:
Woman, why do you thus?
To make us more mischief?

WIFE:
Noah, you might have told me of it!
Morning and evening you were out,
And always at home you let me sit,
Never to know what you were about.

NOAH:
My lady, let me be excused for it.
It was God's will, without a doubt.

WIFE:
What? You think that you're going just
yet?
No, by my faith, you're getting a clout!

NOAH:
I pray you, lady, be still;
Thus God would have it wrought.

WIFE:
You should have learned my will,
Whether I would assent theretill.
And Noah, for that same skill,
This bargain shall be dear bought!

Now, at last, I find and feel
Why you have through the forest
sought.
You should have told me, us to heal,
When we were to such a bargain
brought.

NOAH:
Now, lady, such dread you should not
feel,
For to account it cost you nought.
A hundred winters, I know well,
Are gone since I this work had wrought.
And when I made an ending,
God gave me measure fair
Of each and every thing.
He ordered me to bring
Both beasts and birds young,
Of every kind a pair.

WIFE:
Now surely, if we should escape
unscathed,
And so be saved, as you say here,
My comrades and my cousins both,
I want them safe with us in there.

NOAH:
Too dangerous, on the flood to float.
Look in, and see, and have no fear.

WIFE:
Alas, to me my life is loath.
I live too long, this news to hear.

1 DAUGHTER:
Dear mother, mend your mood,
For we shall with you go.

WIFE:
My friends are overflowed;
I've left them in the flood.

2 DAUGHTER:
Now thank we God all good,
That thus has saved us so.

3 DAUGHTER:
Mother, of this work you paid no heed,
That all should turn to waters wan.

2 DAUGHTER:
Father, what may this marvel mean?
Why did God make the Earth, and
man?

1 DAUGHTER:
So strange a sight was never seen,
Since first that God this world began.

NOAH:
Shut and lock your doors indeed,
For better counsel know I none.
This sorrow is sent for sin,
Therefore to God we pray
That he our ills would end.

3 SON:
May the king of all mankind
Out of this woe us win,
As you are the Lord, and may.

1 SON:
Yea, Lord, as you let us be borne
In this great evil, some help us bid.

NOAH:
My sons, now see, midday and morn,
To these cattle take good heed.
Keep them well with hay and corn;
And women, take up these birds and
feed,
So that from us they're not torn
As long as we this life shall lead.

2 SON:
Father, we were best
Your bidding to fulfil.
Nine months now are past
Since we were thus oppressed.

3 SON:
He that of might is most
May amend it when he will.

NOAH:
Oh, children, it grows clear about!
That may you see there where you sit!

1 SON:
Yes, dear father, look thereout;
See if the water's waning yet.

NOAH:
That shall I do, without a doubt,
Thereby the waning we may wit.
Ah, Lord, to you I bend and bow;
The cataracts, I think, are knit!
Behold, my sons, all three-
The clouds are growing clear!

2 SON:
Ah, Lord, of mercy free,
Beloved may you be!

NOAH:
I shall essay the sea,
How deep that it is here.

WIFE:
Loved be that Lord that gives all grace,
That kindly thus our cares would heal.

NOAH:
I'll cast a line and look a space,
How deep the water is, every deal.
Fifteen cubits of height it has
Of covering over every hill!
But, be well comforted in this case;
It is waning! I know it well.
Therefore, a bird of flight
Now quickly I shall send,
To see if he has sight
Of land on which to light;
Then may we know aright
When our mourning shall end.

Of all the birds that one may find,
The raven is boldest, and wise is he.
You are cranky, like all your kind;
Go forth your way, I say now; flee,
And cautiously see, and return on the
wind
If you find either land or tree.
Nine months herein we been been
pinned,
But when God will, better must be.

1 DAUGHTER:
That Lord that lends us life
To obey all of his laws,
He made both man and wife;
May he help to end our strife.

3 DAUGHTER:
Our cares are keen as a knife;
God grant us now good news.

1 SON:
Father, this bird is gone for long;
I guess that he has found some land
That he can forage for food upon.
That makes him such a failing friend.

NOAH:

Now, son, if he that way has gone,
Since for us all his way he went,
Then may he be, for doing wrong,
Cursed evermore, without an end.
And certainly, to see
When our sorrow shall cease,
Another bird full free
Our messenger shall be.
Now, dove, this order see:
Our comfort to increase.

A faithful bird to send are you,
Above all else in this world wide.
For all our sakes, I pray you go,
And soberly seek, on every side,
Whether the floods be falling now,
That you on the earth may build and
abide.
Bring us some sign, that we may know
What will become of us this tide.

2 DAUGHTER:

Good Lord, now on us look,
And cease our sorrow severe,
Since we all sin forsook
And to thy laws us took.

3 DAUGHTER:

For twelve months, less twelve weeks,
Have we been hovering here.

NOAH:

Now children, we may be blithe and
glad,
And praise our Lord, of Heaven king!
My bird has done as I him bade;
An olive branch I see him bring.
Blessed be, bird, who was not
dismayed,
Who in your strength felt no failing.
More joy in heart I never had;
We shall be saved! Now let us sing!
Come here, my sons, quickly,
For gone is all our strife;
I see here certainly
The Hills of Harmony.

1 SON:

Loved be that Lord surely,
Who to us has lent our life.

[Then Noah and his sons should sing.]

WIFE:

Now all the sorrows we were in,
And all our trials, are no more.
But Noah, where are all our kin
And company we knew before?

NOAH:

All are drowned-leave off your din-
For all their sins they paid, full sore.
A better life let us begin,
So that we grieve our God no more.
He was grieved in great degree
And greatly vexed in mind
For sin, as all may see,
Dum dixit, "Penitet me."
And sorry then was he
That ever he made mankind.

That makes us now to toil and truss;
But, children, he said-I know well
when-

"Arcum ponam in nubibus."

He set his bow to show us then
A covenant between him and us,
In knowledge to all Christian men
That, when the world is ended, thus
He'll never waste it, with water, again.
Thus has God, most of might,
Set his sign full clear
Up in the air, on height.
The rainbow, as is right,
Is clearly seen in sight
All seasons of the year.

2 SON:

Sir, now, since God, our sovereign sire,
So certainly has set his sign,
Then we may see the world's empire
Shall last forever; that is plain!

NOAH:

No, son, that we must not desire,
For if we do we work in vain.
For it shall all be burned with fire,
And never be the world again.

WIFE:

Ah, sir, our hearts are sore
For these words that you say here;
This mischief must be more?

NOAH:

Be not afraid therefore;
You shall not live so long
By many a hundred year.

1 SON:

Father, how shall our lives be led
Since none are in this world but we?

NOAH:

Sons, with your wives you shall be set,
And you shall multiply your seed.
Your children shall each other wed
And worship God, in good degree.
Beasts and birds shall all be bred,
And so, a world shall begin to be.
Now, hard work you shall taste
To win your bread and wine,
For all this world is waste.
These beasts must be unbraced;
Now let us go in haste,
With God's blessing, and mine.

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