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Noah

the legend

A one-person performance

based on Genesis 6:1-9:17

by Ralph Milton

This is a script for a one-person chancel drama. I performed it a number of times in various churches, and it seemed to work quite well, though some folks were a bit upset by what Noah has to say about God at the end.

I didn't memorize this script – I made sure I had the outline of the story thoroughly in my head, and then I ad-libbed, sometimes more successfully than others.

For a costume, Bev made me a cape of the rainbow colors.

You are welcome to use this script, or your own adaptation of it, in your congregation. It could work if read from a pulpit or lectern, but it would need to be carefully rehearsed to capture the changing emotions. Without that, it could be deadly.

I am Noah, and I am a legend.

I am a legend that lives in your imagination. I am a legend that lives in the imagination of Jews and Moslems and Christians, who have told my story and sung my song.

I am a legend that lives and grows in every story told to every child, of arks and floating zoos, of rainbows – of every song that has been sung, of every painting, every dance.

Because I am a legend, I live in the long ago, and I live in the now. I live in ancient tales told by wandering Bedouins, stories sung and danced under the desert stars. I live and grow and breathe and change in the stories copied by aged scribes hunched over stone desks writing on sheepskin with ink of lamp-black and oil.

And I live in the now, as I grow and breathe and change in the fertile fields of your imagination, and the collective imagination of every mind that hears my story dreamed and told.

And so I am what you want me to be. A voice from the past, a voice from the present, perhaps a voice even from the future.

That is because I am Noah. And I am a legend.

You know my story, do you? Well, you know the rainbow legend. You know the cheerful part. The fun part. You know the part about God, who decided to start over again. Of God who looked at creation, who looked at human kind and said, “This will not do.”

And in all that creation there was only one who was righteous in his own generation. It was I, Noah, who in that instant turned from human male into legend. And God said to me:

(A VOICE OVER PA SYSTEM) “Noah!”

I hate it when God does that. Every time God talks to me, I get a tension headache.

(VOICE) Noah!

All right. I’m listening.

(VOICE) I want you to build me an ark.

Do you see what I mean? Do you understand why talking with God gives me a headache? To say nothing of a backache. And tennis elbow like you wouldn’t believe even though it’s 4,000 years before they invent tennis. Build an ark, God says, 450 feet long and 75 feet wide. 45 feet high. (TO GOD) God, do you have any idea how much work is involved?

But this is the part of the story you all know, don’t you. This is the part of the legend you like. Noah and his sons—the story doesn’t mention the daughters—women are pretty well invisible in this legend—here we are building this ark. Don’t you love this legend?

(Singing) “Who built the ark? Noah, Noah,
Who built the ark?”

Brother Noah built the ark.”

And it gets even better as the legend goes along, because soon we have
all the animals, two by two,
walking into a floating zoo.
zebras and elephants and tigers, too.

Male and female. (*Noah loses his cool and yells angrily.*) Have you any idea how much food we had to put down for those beasts?

(*He collects himself again.*) I’m sorry. Like I said, I get a headache whenever God talks to me.

And soon we have the ark finished... (*Suddenly Noah seems to lose his concentration again.*) You think I’m crazy, don’t you. Well, I’m just doing what God tells me!

(*He regains control.*) Sorry...ha ha, (*With elaborate cheerfulness.*)

Soon the ark is finished and we start loading. We load the food and we load the animals, and everybody is happy and singing and isn’t it wonderful how you can put two of everything in the whole world into a vessel about the size of this church building. But this is a legend, and you don’t get technical with a legend.

(Singing) Along came the animals two by two,
The rats and the skunks and the kangaroo...

And we get everybody nicely loaded into the ark. We are all in the ark and nothing happens. We sit in that ark for seven days and the people of the village are walking around the outside of the ark laughing and joking and thinking what a donkey Noah has turned out to be. (*Yelling over the side of the ark.*) “Look, I’m just following orders, OK? I’m just doing what I’m told.”

Then it rains. You have never seen rain like that. And it seemed as if the water came up from below and it seemed as if the heavens just opened right up, and it rained, 40 days 40 nights without stopping. And the ark floated up and up and we bounced around on the waves, and we bounced around on the waves and we bounced around on the waves...and....

(*Suddenly Noah starts to feel seasick, rushes to the rail, and notices what is in the water.*)

The water is full of death. Bloated, stinking, corpses floating on the water, people, animals, birds, all over. God did this. God killed everybody. God killed everything. (*To God.*) God, you did this? Did you know this was going to happen? Did you know this? You murdered everybody and everything. Was this necessary, God? (*Noah holds his hurting head again, then notices the audience and pulls himself together again.*)

I’m sorry. It’s the motion sickness. It’s the headache. I loose track of the story. (*Sarcastically*) It’s a beautiful wonderful story, we floated around there, bobbing around on the water for 40 days and 40 nights or at least an awful long time, and I sent out a raven to see where it would go, and it just flew around and didn’t prove anything.

Then I sent out a dove, and it flew way up and out, but in a little while it came back looking very tired. So I brought it in and gave it some of the little bit of food we had left, and waited another week, and sent the dove out again.

And this time, this time, it came back with an olive branch in its beak. Isn’t this a wonderful part of the legend? Then, a week later I sent it out again and it didn’t come back, so I knew we must be near land, and sure enough, the next thing I heard was a scraping noise and I looked out and there was land, right near by, so I lowered the gang plank and.... (*yelling*) don’t everybody rush off at once. Yes, I know it stinks to high heaven in here, but don’t trample each other. Be careful!

And so I know what I have to do. Right away quick. Before God has anymore bright ideas about killing off any more people. An altar (*Use the altar or communion table.*). Right here. An altar and a sacrifice.

(*Praying*) “Great Yahweh, we have been faithful. We did everything, exactly as you told us. We followed orders right down to the letter. Yes sir. And it’s OK that you slaughtered all of creation. You know what you are doing. You have your logic, I’m sure. Mine is not to reason why. Mine is but to do and die, ha ha. So here’s some nice roasted meat....you like the smell. It’s coming up to you God, to show you how wonderful you are and how we think you are the greatest God ever, you top all the charts and (*breaking down in tears*) please don’t drown anymore people, God.

(*Noah hears something.*) Did you hear that? Why is it that nobody hears God’s voice except me? And did you know what God said? This is different. This is really different. God made a promise. No more floods. No more floods. No more mass destruction.

In fact, God explained. No more killing. God offered a covenant...an agreement, kind of a one-way promise...and this is for all creation, see. All people. All the animals and birds and plants and stuff. Everything. First of all, God says, no more killing. But then God isn't going to do anymore killing either.

Did you hear that? God isn't going to be going around killing people anymore. Oh, do you see that? That bow in the sky. That's God's bow. God isn't going to use it to shoot with anymore...God put that bow in the sky and painted it all those beautiful colors and that's God's promise.

So God, just let me get this right. Does that mean that human beings are going to do what they are told from now on? When you say jump, they'll say how high? I mean it would be nice because frankly I'm a bit tired of being the only righteous man in this generation.

No, eh? They are going to be just as cranky and as rotten and as disobedient and as bull-headed and selfish as always. Really? (*Yelling*) Then what's been the point of all this?

(RAINBOW CLOAK DROPS FROM HIS SHOULDERS)

This is the really hard part about being a legend. You never really know what it's all about. Ah. I give up. I do what I am told, and I save my neck and I save my family and a few animals, and what is the point of all this carnage, when humanity is no better afterwards than before. No lessons learned. Nothing changed. And you know something. Every night I dream about looking over the edge of that ark and seeing those corpses floating around, and one of those corpses has my face on it.

My head is all messed up. All messed up. I try to keep my mind on some work. I mean, when I'm not building arks or bouncing around in them getting seasick, I'm a dry land farmer. So I plant some grapes and the next thing I know I've made some wine, and then I get grand stinking drunk because I am so messed up.

I don't like this part of the legend. Maybe you don't either, because this is the part that hardly anybody ever tells anyone.

I get myself stinko, and I am lying in my tent without a stitch of clothes on, and in comes one of my sons, Ham, and sees me like that. He's embarrassed out of his mind, and calls his two brothers, Shem and Japheth, and they back in and cover me up, and I wake up and realize what has happened. And I am still drunk, right? But I am flaming mad.

"You looked at your poor sick daddy like that? Why did you come into my tent? You had no business in my tent?" And then along comes Ham's kid, Canaan, and I don't like something about the way he looks or something, I don't know, I was too drunk, I don't remember, but I cursed him. I cursed him. And in a legend, when you curse somebody, they stay cursed. I cursed Canaan, who had nothing to do with this mess, but I cursed my grandson and said he would be a slave to the others.

(*Crestfallen*) You are right God. Nothing has changed. Humanity is just as rotten as it was before the flood. I am even more rotten than I was before the flood. I have become a drunkard and a child abuser. And so I want to know. Given the facts – given the reality of the human race, does the promise still hold?

It does?

Holy.....!!! You mean, you are prepared to keep on with us. Us? Humans? And you want our help with creation? You want us, to work with you? Who are you kidding, God. It'll never work. Given our track record, not a chance. Not a chance.

(To Audience) And that's the end of the legend. (PICK UP RAINBOW ROBE)
That's the end of my story.

Except did you notice something. I told you this was the legend of Noah, but it's really a story about God. It's a legend about God and it's a legend about you.

It's a legend about the God of our infantile minds, the petulant childhood God who builds a house of blocks and knocks them down. It's about the vengeful, punishing God we learned about in our childhood. This legend is about God growing up. The education of God.

It's about a young and inexperienced God who makes a world and a people and then they all mess up, and God gets mad and decides...just like a kid...to wipe out the whole business and start over. It is the legend of the God who lives in our imaginations.

And the legend grows. The legend grows and matures until the God we know becomes the God who calls us to be part of this creation, to love it, to care for it, to love each other and to love ourselves.

But look. We have the rainbow, we have the promise. (PUT ROBE ON COMMUNION TABLE) Humanity ain't much to write home about. We fouled our own nest and turned the whole thing into a Walt Disney funny farm, an interactive networked zoo, an electronic ark floating in the oceans of space.

But God has decided to live with it. God is even willing to love this crazy world of ours.

So I guess the question is, if God is willing to love this broken world, are we?

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,
all of them available through Wood Lake Publishing.**

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