



Symbols of Hope

1. The Rainbow

Traditionally, the rainbow has been a Christian symbol! It's found in the story of Noah (**Genesis 5:32-9:29**), where we read that God was grieved by humanity's wickedness and sin and, after much pleading for them to repent and receive forgiveness, sent a global flood to purge the earth from its evil. Noah and his family are saved by God through hiding in the ark which He had provided for them. After the waters had receded, God sent the rainbow as a covenant promise that he would never again punish the earth by water because of sin.

But the significance of the rainbow is that it points to the punishment which would come. Like we read in its name, the rain-BOW is shaped like a warriors bow, a bow which does not point down at the earth but upward at heaven. It literally points to the fact that the punishment for sin will fall on God himself. Jesus Christ, the God-man, heavens King, was ultimately punished on the cross for the sin of the world. The rainbow is a sign of the covenant of grace: that we do not have to face the wrath of God, but Jesus Christ, God's Son, bore the punishment of our sin in our place.

Elsewhere in Bible we see that Jesus is associated with a Rainbow! Look at **Ezekiel 1:26** and in **Revelation 4:2-3**.

2. The Cross

The cross is the most iconic symbol in Christianity and of the Easter story! This is because it is the centre point and climax of Hyman history! This is where Jesus bore our sins in his body and took the punishment for our sin and the wrath of God upon himself! It is the fulfilment of what the rainbow pointed to and the incident which we should remember every time we see a rainbow!

God will not and did not punish the world again by water, but punished his Son for man's sin on the cross. By trusting in Jesus' death on the cross for us, we are saved from the wrath of God and the punishment we deserve for sin. At the foot of the Cross we can know peace with God because of Jesus' shed blood (**Colossians 1:20**).

3. The Ark

Linked with the rainbow and the cross, the ark is a symbol of safety and of burial. It was God's rescue plan for Noah and his family and for anyone who would repent of sin and turn from their wicked ways (**2 Peter 2:5** and **Hebrews 11:7**). In this way it symbolises Christ, who is God's rescue plan for anyone who repents of sin and flees to Him for safety. It was on the ark that life was preserved when the watery chaos ensued around it and it is only with Christ that our life can be preserved from sin and the storms of a sinful world! Christ is the Father's rescue plan for fallen humanity and the ark of our salvation.

It is also a symbol of a Christian's death, burial and resurrection life in Jesus. **1 Peter 3:20-21** says that the ark preserved the life of Noah and his family while the waters of baptism engulfed them. This baptism is then linked with the resurrection of Jesus, which saves us! The ark then, can be associated with baptism, an event which is very dear to Christians! In our baptism, we are reminded that we died with Jesus when he was engulfed in our place, that our sins were buried with Him when he went down into the grave and that we were raised with Him when He rose on the third day.

4. The Empty Tomb

The empty tomb signifies the great victory of the resurrection! Jesus is alive and not dead! He has conquered and vanquished death completely! Like the cross, the empty tomb is a vital part of what Christians believe, for without the resurrection of Jesus, we would still be dead in our sins. The Apostle Paul even says that our preaching and faith is in vain if Jesus did not rise in victory over death (**1 Corinthians 15:14**). The empty tomb is a symbol to teach us that death and decay could not hold our King Jesus. He is victorious over the curse of death, which is the consequence of our sin, and now offers new resurrection life to all who trust in Him! The empty tomb should help us in our daily walk with Jesus, helping us remember that with Him we have victory and triumph over humanity's two biggest enemies. Because He lives, we also will live! (**John 14:19**).

5. The Dove and the Olive Branch

The dove with the olive branch in Noah's story, was a sign from God to Noah that new life had begun to sprout after the destruction and devastation of the flood. Noah knew it was safe to exit the ark because the olive branch represented life. More than this, it represented abundant life!

In the Bible, there was great significance given to the olive tree and the olive branch, as it was closely associated with the abundant life of the Holy Spirit. That is why we read that Kings, Prophets and Priests were always anointed with oil extracted from the olive tree, as they were to be filled with the life of God's Holy Spirit for their ministry.

In the New Testament, when Jesus was baptised, the dove reappears, and the Gospel writers declare that this was the Holy Spirit falling on Him in power to prepare Him for His life-giving ministry (**Matthew 3:16** and **Luke 3:22**). He is the Spirit filled man, given to us by the Father. He is our King, Prophet and Priest who, by His death and resurrection, brings new life to us! As Paul says in **Romans 6:10-11**, The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, now lives in us and He will give us power to live new resurrection lives.

Just like the dove and the olive branch were signs of a new creation life for Noah, we Christians - shaped by everything that Jesus has done for us - should also be signs for others, pointing to the new creation hope that is found in our Saviour.