NOAH’S ARK

The biblical story of Noah’s ark, depicted here, is found in the book of Genesis (6:9–9:28). To punish people for their wicked and violent ways, God decided to send heavy rains to earth for forty days and forty nights. First, however, he instructed Noah, a righteous man, to build an ark for his family and two of every kind of animal. After the rains stopped, a dove sent out by Noah returned to the ark with an olive branch, proof that the floodwater had receded and plants could grow again. Then God created a beautiful rainbow in the sky as a symbol of his promise to never destroy the earth again.

This painting by Edward Hicks shows a long, curving line of animals approaching Noah’s huge boat. Prancing horses and a serious-looking lion stare out at us, while pairs of elegant, black-and-white-striped zebras, giraffes, camels, tigers, and hippopotamuses stand patiently. What other animals can you find? In the distance, tiny black birds fly down from the dark, rain-filled clouds overhead.

Edward Hicks learned to paint decorative motifs when he was apprenticed to a coach maker at the age of thirteen. Later he became a successful sign painter and a devout Quaker preacher. Although his business conflicted with Quaker beliefs—that art is a distraction and a needless luxury—Hicks considered his art to be an expression of his faith and created paintings that told religious stories. This is the only painting he made of the story of Noah’s ark.