

William's Noah's Ark



Let me tell you about my son. His name is William. He is a little over a year old. William is a very special little boy, as he came to us later in our life. My husband and I had been together over 8 years before we became blessed with his arrival. We had been granted lands by our King in the year 1350 and we were very concerned about who might inherit them. My mind has been put to rest over this matter, as anybody can see how good William is. Why it has been weeks since he has chased any chickens or sheep, besides I think it was the neighbor's boy.

The Noah's Ark I have built is designed to be played with by my son. The roof and front will lift off to allow for easier access to the inside. The pieces are all smooth and painted with a non toxic paint, so they can be crewed on. Because very few toys have survived the riggers of childhood and time, I have had to create the ark from pictures in several illuminated manuscripts. I have also found a number of pictures of children's toy boats and animals, so I feel it is a reasonable supposition that an ark might have been built.

The Bible gives us a rough guideline for the design of the ark. *"And God said to Noah,...Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its breadth fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the*

ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and set the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second and third decks....And you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female." (Genesis 11—20) Assuming a cubit is a unit of measurement, then the width of the ark should be 1/6 of its length. My ark is scaled at about 1/5. I felt that adding a third story would make the ark top heavy, apparently medieval people felt the same way, as I only found a single illumination of a three story ark. My ark has multiple doors along its sides, so the animals can get fresh air.

Due to the limited number of surviving toys from the early Middle Ages I have made some assumptions. To begin with children love to play with animals. (A large number of horse toys have survived from the Middle Ages.) By the 1300's the church had a fairly strong hold on the population and play was thought of as frivolous. But play which revolved around a religious subject might have been acceptable, hence the choice of an ark to illustrate Noah's story. Illuminated Manuscripts contain numerous of pictures of Noah's Ark. From these pictures I concluded that an ark built by a loving parent of the 1300's would have reflected the art and architecture of that time period. It would have two stories with curved arch doorways, typical of Gothic Architecture. Once the first animal (polar bear) was cut out I knew the arches would need to be wide enough for two animal to stand next to each other and tall enough not to bump their heads, except the giraffe.

I have chosen animals which are native to Europe or animals which are in Bestiaries. These animals would need to be able to see over the edge of the boat, as also indicated by a number of illustrations. The ark is scaled so the polar bear can put his nose to the wind, over the side.



I discovered that many times the Bestiaries have illustrations of animals in fantastic colors, not generally found in nature (for example I found several green horses.) This is the reason I have not painted all of my animals brown. I found it interesting that the animals in the Aberdeen Bestiary have diapering on them in the same style as Gothic Illuminations. My animals are also diapered. I have painted the pairs of animals the same color, even when the male and female of the species look different, for an example look at the green lions.

Unfortunately my ark will not float, it is too heavy. I have tried to mimic the curved front shape of the hull, complete with the painted details of planking and nails.

