

Iris is a goddess of
the sea and sky



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Many people yearn to have a meaning of life', or why the world is the way it is. Why are there thunderstorms, or why are there rainbows in the sky after it rains? For people today, scientific research provides the reasons everyone craves. In ancient Greece, things were a little bit different.

Myths were used as a way to teach a lesson, or explain the happenings of day to day life. A common recurrence in Greek mythology is the presence of gods and goddesses. These gods and goddesses typically intervened in the humans' lives and many times acted as what we would consider the 'supreme court' or disciplinarian. Their most prominent gods and goddesses lived at the top of Mount Olympus, and the Greeks used myths to narrate their lives.

Iris is a goddess of the sea and sky. She is the daughter of the oceanid Elektra, a cloud nymph, and sea god Thaumus. She is sibling to Arke, Aello, Celaeno, and Ocypete. Iris is married to Zephyrus, the god of west winds, and delivered her son, Pothos, who was one of Aphrodite's erotes. For Greeks who lived on the coast, the rainbow was customarily seen bridging the gap between the sea and the clouds. Thus, Iris is the quintessence of the rainbow. She was thought to provide the clouds with water from the oceans below. She is also believed to articulate the bond between the gods above and humanity on earth.

Iris was also a messenger goddess, known primarily for her loyalty to Hera, the goddess of women, family, marriage, and childbirth. Iris is often represented with winged sandals, a staff, and golden wings. Iris is known to be a loyal servant to Hera, alongside her responsibilities as messenger of the

gods. In ancient Greek art, Iris is famously depicted in between, or right beside Hera and Zeus, holding a pitcher that is filled with 'nectar'. She would use this pitcher to serve nectar to the gods as a way of giving thanks for using her skills. Iris' skills were utilized because of her ability to navigate from sky to earth and even the underworld at brisk speeds.

Iris is written in The Iliad as a messenger for the gods on Mount Olympus. As a mandate from Zeus, Iris is ordered to carry a jug of water from the Styx River along with her. The water in the jug gives her the ability to incapacitate all of whom deceive themselves, or others. Iris' loyalty to the gods is demonstrated in the last book of The Iliad, when Zeus sends Iris to inform Priam concerning his decision regarding his son's body (Book 24). She is also shown telling Menelaus when his wife, Helen, has been taken hostage. Also, she single-handedly calls upon the winds to light the fire at Patroclus' funeral, per Achilles' request.

Many Greeks consider Iris to be the goddess of rainbows, communication, and messages. Iris is frequently depicted in paintings and on vases; and while she has no sculptures created in her honor, it is believed that she is the basis of minor lines of worship due to her reputation as a messenger god and her ability to fulfill humans' prayers.