

The Baby's Mother **Exodus 2:1-10**

May 14, 2020

1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. 5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" 8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water" (NRSV).

Exodus continues the story of Jacob's clan in Egypt. The main theological premise that Exodus shows is God rescuing Israel due to the covenant that God has already made. The underlying theological premise is one of motivation. Its aim is to motivate people to worship God, observe God's laws, and have empathy for the disadvantaged. When people experience hardship it can act as a refining agent to bring people closer to God. When God rescues people it motivates people to appreciate God more.

As generations pass the nation of Israel grows to the point where the Egyptians begin to fear that the Hebrews will be more powerful. So, they oppressed the Hebrews and forced them into slavery. Pharaoh desires to control the Hebrew population by commanding the midwives to kill all the boys that are born. This is very a harsh and cruel decree. It doesn't work because the midwives have courage and defy the Pharaoh. They get by with this defiance by telling him that the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, they are more vigorous and the babies are born before the midwives can get there. So, the Pharaoh commands the Egyptians to throw every Hebrew boy into the Nile.

This brings us to today's Scripture. It is a famous Bible story that is very interesting. Once again the Hebrews outsmart the Egyptians and make the best of a bad situation. Today I'm going to focus on the mother. Just think how terrible it is for the mother of Moses. When the male Hebrew babies are murdered, the mother is living in total fear; the greatest fear ever. There is nothing that she can do except hide him. Then she is faced with the reality of what to do when she can't hide him anymore. Imagine the poor mother. The absolute worst thing ever is to lose a child. She will do anything to save the child. Imagine all the worry and the sleepless nights full of anxiety over finding a way to save her baby. If she approaches Pharaoh's daughter (or anyone else for that matter) and begs her to please save her son, to please have pity, it will not work. Maybe you have seen on the news in a war or some disaster where a mother out of desperation passes her baby off to someone else so that the baby will be rescued. Her maternal instinct is to save the baby. She will worry about her own survival and chance for reunion later. Here in the Bible the mother of Moses has no one to pass the baby on to. The mother is desperate, without options, and has to be full of worry and anxiety. Then she gets an idea and devises a plan to get the baby to Pharaoh's daughter and have Pharaoh's daughter accept it as her own.

The story of Moses and his mother reminds me of our response to stray cats. If someone asks me to adopt a kitten my response is "No, I don't want a cat." But, we have had several feral cats in the neighborhood. We will catch them, tame them, feed, and care for them. When I see a poor helpless and hungry kitten I can't help but pity the kitty. We end up taking in another kitten when otherwise we would say no. The mother of Moses came up with a brilliant pity the kitty strategy. For it to work she has to know certain personality characteristics of Pharaoh's daughter. The mother of Moses has to have a certain degree of confidence that Pharaoh's daughter is not cruel like her father is. The mother of Moses has to know her habits; where she goes to bathe and when. For her plan to work, the mother of Moses must know when, where, and how to spot the baby.

It's a beautiful story but I think the most beautiful part is the character of the mother. Just imagine what the mother might be going through at the intense, critical moment, when Pharaoh's daughter finds the baby that Pharaoh wants dead. Pharaoh's daughter could pull the baby out of the basket, honor her father, and toss him into the river. The mother of Moses had to take that risk. Can you imagine being in her shoes at that moment? She had to take that risk. She had to go all in, bet it all, on her one and only chance. The mother of Moses had hope that Pharaoh's daughter would have compassion and pity the kitty that she immediately recognized as Hebrew. It's a brilliant strategy. Step 1 is to let Pharaoh's daughter find the baby. Step 2 is for the sister to manage to intervene and set up the mother as the baby's nurse. Step 3 is to become nurse incognito. Imagine the mother during this intense drama. She is hanging by on the sidelines. She has to keep cool. She can't let anyone see her get rattled.

It's a beautiful story. The mother ends up saving her baby, then nursing her own baby incognito, and then getting paid for it. Mothers deserve our praise. Being a mother is much more than giving birth. It's giving life. It is giving new life and it is the giving of her life for the sake of the child so that the child can have a life. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our mothers that we cannot pay. Praise be to God.