

**The Voices of Mothers**  
**Second Sunday of Advent**  
**Sardis Baptist Church**  
**December 6, 2015**  
**Exodus 2:1-10**

*During Advent, we continue to explore the voices of the mothers who have guarded our faith. This week, we meet the women who nurtured and protected Moses: Jochebed, Miriam, and Pharaoh's Daughter.*

**The Voice of Jochebed :**  
**Tillie Duncan**

Those years were fearful and full of uncertainty. We Israelites had lived in the land of Egypt for hundreds of years— but always in a ghetto located near Memphis, never assimilating with the Egyptians. It seems that we prosper in spite of everything, but the government becomes ever more oppressive. More laws which make us second-class citizens; cultural expectations which keep us from ever rising to our potential.

At the time I was expecting my third child, we were more like slaves than citizens. And the men overseeing the work we were required to do became angry at the slightest provocation, beating our men and abusing them verbally.

My name is Jochebed, married to Amram, both of us descendents of Levi who was the son of Jacob. The son whose descendents became priests and keepers of the temple. I am remembering the time when my second son was born. Already the mother of two, Aaron and Miriam, I was excited about the prospect of another child. Except... Oh, I would have loved to have another boy, but I was praying that this child would be a girl. You see, the Pharaoh, great king of Egypt, had decreed that all boys born to an Israelite woman be killed. First he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill them as they came into the world. When that didn't happen, he gave permission for anyone seeing a new-born boy to throw him in the river.

The day came when our second little boy was born. I must shore up my faith. I felt within my bones that this child was destined for great things. God must have something special for him to do. I determined to hide him for as long as I could.

And I did! I successfully hid him for three months, changing the hiding place often, from the storage room to a stable and back, but I knew that I could not keep him hidden forever. Always fearful that he would be heard or seen, but trusting that God would keep him safe in spite of my fears.

I began weaving a basket from the bulrushes that grew by the river Nile – a little ark. The papyrus plant the bulrushes came from would keep my baby safe from the crocodiles. I smoothed the inside with clay so that he wouldn't be scratched and plastered bitumen to the outside to make it watertight. Then I placed the little ark in the Nile among the reeds along the bank so that it wouldn't be caught in the current and float away downstream. My little girl Miriam helped me, and I left her near by to watch. That way I would know what became of him.

The outcome was wonderful! My baby's life was saved and I was paid to take care of him for the first few years of his life in the court of Pharaoh. This gave me a chance to teach him, to tell him about Yahweh, to tell him Hebrew stories, the stories of his true heritage. To impart to him as only a parent can the things that matter most. And then to trust that as an Egyptian he would be able to more fully help his own people.

### **The Voice of Miriam: Jonathan Eidson**

Many times during my life, the words of Cain came to my mind as I asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In my mind, I was always thinking, "Yes!" You see, from the time he was a baby, I was *always* looking out for my brother. You may have heard of him but perhaps I should just tell you the story.

It really started years before I was even born with my ancestor Joseph. Of course he was known in Egypt as Zaphenath-Paneah. That's a different story but suffice it to say, Joseph wound up in Egypt and when famine struck our land, my other ancestors joined him there. Apart from Pharaoh, Joseph was the most important person in all of Egypt. Well, at the ripe old age of 110, Joseph passed away and eventually a new Pharaoh came along and Joseph meant nothing to him. Things got tricky for all of us.

First of all because Pharaoh noticed our people had become so numerous, he decided to make slaves of us. Well, God blessed us. We were a fertile people and we continued to grow in numbers. Next, pharaoh told our midwives that when they were helping our women in birth, they were to kill any newborn boys. Again, God was watching out for us, this time by giving Shiphrah and Puah courage to let our boys live. We became even more numerous. Next, Pharaoh told his own people to kill every newborn Hebrew boy.

About that time, my parents got married and not long after that, I was born. We had a happy home considering the terrible conditions we endured. I guess that was just another way God took care of us.

As I said earlier, the more Pharaoh tried to oppress us, the more numerous our people seemed to become. It worked that way for my parents too. Before we knew it, my mother was expecting. Have you ever experienced conflicting feelings about the same situation? That's the way it was for me when I found out my mother was pregnant. We knew the

Egyptians were killing all our baby boys so you can imagine, on the one hand, I was so excited. I was going to be a sister! At the same time, I was terrified because I knew if my mother had a boy, he'd never see his first birthday.

I learned to pray and I prayed all the time. It seemed like no time at all and I had a little brother. I just knew that somehow, God would answer my prayers and spare my brother the awful death that met our baby boys. I remember when my mother and father sat down with me. Mom said, "We have a plan." I almost said, "Of course you do. That's what I've been praying for." Mom told me the plan was to take one of those baskets we were always making from the papyrus plants. We would cover it with tar and

pitch to make it water tight. Then we would wrap up my brother, put him in the basket and set him in the Nile River.

I sat there looking at her with my mouth hanging open. Even as a girl, I had this habit of speaking my mind. What would you expect? My name means 'rebellion' or 'hope for change'. So of course, before I could stop myself, I said, "That's the plan? You have *got* to be kidding me! A crying basket is going to fool the executioners?" It wasn't the smartest thing I've ever said but come on, you think through the situation and that's the solution that comes to them? Can you imagine the execution squad hearing a baby and going to investigate? They see a floating basket and say, "Oh look, it's not a baby; it's just a floating basket."

I didn't want to participate in this ridiculous plan, but I didn't have a choice. My brother was starting to make some noise and it was only a matter of time before he'd be discovered and killed. We walked to the Nile and placed the basket in the water among the reeds. Thankfully, it didn't sink. My mother asked me to stand at a distance and watch to see what would happen.

You probably won't believe it but Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the Nile. When she spotted the basket, she sent one of her maids to get it. When they opened the basket, they found my brother crying and Pharaoh's daughter felt sorry for him. That's when I did something incredibly smart for someone so young. Well, it seemed incredibly smart at the time but as I've reflected on it through the years I've realized it had less to do with my mind and more to do with my soul. You see, a little girl prayed as hard as she could that her little brother would somehow live and what I thought was a ridiculous idea from my parents was actually God at work sparing my brother. God, I believe came to me in a moment of inspiration and the words just flowed out of my mouth. I found myself standing in front of Pharaoh's daughter saying, "Shall I go fetch one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?" She said, "Yes, go."

I went and got my mother. She mistook my tears of joy for a sign that something awful had happened. It took me a few minutes to calm her and make her understand that Pharaoh's daughter wanted her to come *right* now. We ran the whole way there yet somehow, I was able to tell her to respond calmly and not let on that the baby was hers lest Pharaoh's daughter might reconsider.

Pharaoh's daughter told my mother to take the baby and nurse him. She even said she'd pay my mother for this. So my brother got to go back home with us. Momma nursed him and when he was weaned, she took him back to Pharaoh's daughter and she adopted him as her own son. She named him Moses which meant "pulled out" because she pulled him out of the river.

I watched him grow up from a distance. He was always with Rameses and they'd be racing each other in their chariots or getting in to some kind of mischief or another. His life was easy but even from a distance; I could tell he knew there was something different about him. He saw the people who looked like him treated as slaves and I could see he didn't like it.

One day, we were all together again. Moses had to get to know Aaron and me. He'd never really known either of us. We were amazed at the stories he told us, stories of a burning bush and the God that was within it, our God. It was this that led him back to us. When God asked him to speak to the Hebrews,

Moses told God he wasn't good with words. God recommended that he find his brother Aaron who was good with words to speak for him. It wasn't so much that Moses wasn't good with words, it was that he'd grown up speaking the Egyptian language as opposed to our Hebrew tongue. Honestly, we kind of poked fun at him a little bit but that didn't last long. When I saw him throw down his staff and watched as it became a live snake, I suggested to Aaron that we stop poking fun.

There is more to my story but that's what I wanted to tell you today and I hope I made one thing clear. You may think your prayers don't make a difference. In fact, I wondered that myself but it was because when I'd prayed for my brother, I was looking for answers that made sense to me. God answered in a way that made sense for a whole nation. God listened to the sobbing prayers of a little girl and saved her little brother from sure death by directing a floating basket into the arms of the only person who could save him, the daughter of Pharaoh. But God's answer was bigger than anything I ever could have imagined and Moses led our people from slavery to freedom. I bet that's why one of our Rabbis, a man who came long after I was gone taught others to pray saying, "Thy will be done." Have you tried it?

Joyce Hollyday's book, *Clothed with the Sun: Biblical Women, Social Justice & Us*, was helpful in the development of this story.

**The Voice of Pharaoh's Daughter:  
Bob Stillerman**

Pharaoh's daughter approaches the river for her morning bath. As she walks, she confides to a maiden:

My daddy. Bless his heart. Always so eager to show his strength and his power. Brawn before brains. Always. Just buy another chariot, or talk louder, or beat up the people that pose a threat to you. Look at me, I'm the big, bad Pharaoh, child of the Sun God.

I swear, St. Peter must have a special place in heaven reserved for my mama to put up with all this nonsense. Then again, Daddy is building her a pyramid to spend eternity in, and it's filled with gold, so she does have that going for her.

But honestly, what's my dad so afraid of? The Hebrew people are in captivity. Why must we spend every waking moment consumed with subduing them, with torturing them, with sucking the life out them?

The attendant replies:

So, I guess you didn't hear the news? Your father has declared that all newborn Hebrew males be thrown into the river. We can't have this labor force turn against us, or start a rebellion. It would be chaos.

"Ugh!" Says Pharaoh's daughter. "When will they let women rule this place?"

As Pharaoh's daughter approaches the river bank, she notices something. It's a basket of some sort, and so she sends one of her servants to fetch it. It's a baby boy, and seeing him, Pharaoh's daughter realizes

he is one of the Hebrews' children, and she takes pity on him. She makes arrangements for a Hebrew woman to nurse the child, and eventually, once the child grows up, she will make him her own.

Pharaoh's daughter joins a college of other courageous women who refuse to obey Pharaoh's command. They choose to value life, even when it endangers their own. Pharaoh's daughter, along with the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, and Jochebed and Miriam, invest themselves in the protection of one life. And what a life it will be! Moses' leadership will free a people.

It's Pharaoh's daughter who names Moses – "I drew him out of water." And just like his adopted Mother, Moses will also be astute. His mother noticed a basket in the reeds. Moses will take notice of a burning bush that is not consumed. And it's this astuteness that will introduce Moses to YHWH.

Pharaoh's daughter, and the other women who nurtured and protected Moses, saw hope and possibility in a small child. They dreamed of creating an environment where Moses could grow to live into his potential. They watched him. They encouraged him. They protected him. They waited for God to work in him, and while they waited, God also worked in them.

This Advent season, we too await the birth of the One who will change the world we know. What steps will we take to ensure the Christ Child comes into a world full of possibilities?