

## Miriam

### **Exodus 2:1-10**

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. 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. His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. 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. 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. 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?" Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 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. 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."

Mama said it was a scary time to be pregnant. She felt like everywhere she went, the Egyptians were staring at her. Of course, they always stare at us. We're different; we're Hebrews. For some reason, the Egyptians seem to be afraid of us. Like we're going to take over or something. It seems paranoid to me, but I guess they all listen to Pharaoh. And he doesn't want the Hebrews to get too powerful. That's why they've forced us to become slaves. But the worst part is, Pharaoh is so paranoid that he wants to kill all the Hebrew baby boys. Us girls he doesn't mind so much, but he's worried about the boys growing up to be big and strong. That's why Mama was scared to be pregnant. If the baby was a boy, the midwives had been told to drown it in the river.

But still, she had to make preparations to welcome a new baby. Mama was planning to do the same thing every other Hebrew mother was doing – hide her baby when it was born. So all her preparations had to be in secret. All the things for the baby – the clothes, the diapers, the bed – they had to be hidden away. And Mama knew that if the baby was a boy, and needed to be kept secret, she was going to need help. She was going to have to spend all her time making sure the

boy didn't cry. Didn't attract any attention from the neighbors or the Egyptians. She explained that she was going to need me to take on a lot more responsibility.

I didn't mind. I already was the one who fetched water every day. But Mama started teaching me how to cook different foods. Most 7-year-old girls help with the cooking, but Mama wanted me to be in charge. So she taught me how to keep the fire at just the right temperature. When to add oil, and when to add flour to the bread. She taught me how to serve the food to the men without bothering them.

When it came time for Mama to have the baby, we were ready. When the midwives told Mama that she had given birth to a little boy, she was terrified. But it turns out, they didn't want to follow Pharaoh's instructions. They let her keep the baby and promised that they would say nothing, because they feared and worshipped God. And so we started the hard work of hiding a baby from the world.

Mama had to hold him pretty much all the time. That way, if he started to cry, she could quiet him down right away. But that also meant that Mama had to stay hidden in the back room of the house. If we needed anything outside the house, I had to go do it. Fetching the water, buying the food, all by myself. But we made it work. And no one seemed to even be suspicious. But after about three months, my little brother was getting harder to hide. He was getting bigger. He was making more noise. People were starting to notice that they never saw Mama anywhere anymore.

Mama started to worry that if the Egyptians found out she had hidden and kept a male child, not only would they kill him, they might harm the rest of our family as well. So she decided it was time for a new plan. Mama sent me to go buy a basket that was large enough to hold the baby. When I brought it home, she used some pitch to waterproof it. The next morning,

just before the sun rose, we went down to the Nile river, bringing the baby and the basket with us. With tears in her eyes, Mama said a prayer, then put my little brother in the basket and set the basket in the river. I think Mama forgot I was there, because she didn't say anything to me. She just turned around and walked home as fast as I've ever seen her walk.

I couldn't stand to just watch the basket float away and never know what happened. So as it sailed down the river, I followed along, hiding in the reeds along the bank. After a while, once the sun was up, the basket floated to where there was a young Egyptian woman bathing. I was really worried. Not only was she Egyptian, but based on the way she was dressed and the number of slaves and servants with her, it was obvious she was from Pharaoh's house. If she saw my brother, would she order him killed?

But instead, when she opened the basket, her face became soft. My brother was crying, but she cooed and sang to him, comforting him. I knew then that she wasn't going to hurt him, so I came out from the reeds where I was hiding. Suddenly, I had an idea. If she was going to take care of this baby, she was first going to need to find someone to nurse him. What if I offered to find someone for her? What if I offered to find a Hebrew woman to feed this Hebrew baby? I didn't have to go find just anyone; I could go get Mama! No one would have to know she was actually my brother's mother. So summoning up all my courage, I asked the princess, "Would you like me to go get a Hebrew woman to nurse this Hebrew baby for you?"

I held my breath for what seemed like ages, waiting for her to answer. After all, she might still decide to kill the baby. But instead, she sent me to find someone. I ran as fast as I've ever run in my life, tripping and stumbling along the path that led home. When I burst in the door, the whole story of the morning just spilled out. Mama had to make me stop and start over and talk slower before she understood what had happened. Once she realized how God had

answered her prayer, she followed me quickly. The young woman – who turned out to be Pharaoh's daughter – had no reason not to hire my mother as the nurse for my little brother. So now, not only does my brother get to live, but Mama gets to spend more time with him. And she's going to be paid for her work!

[PAUSE]

When I was seven years old, I witnessed a miracle that saved my brother's life. But I never could have imagined what would happen when he grew up. That he would confront Pharaoh and lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt and out of slavery. On the day he parted the sea and we all crossed to safety, I led the women of our nation in a song and dance of celebration, tambourine in hand.

As we wandered through the wilderness, my brother Aaron and I worked with Moses. Aaron and I were considered prophets in our own right. Even as a woman, God came to me in dreams. But it wasn't always easy to be Moses' siblings. Once, we confronted Moses for marrying a Cushite woman instead of a Hebrew woman. We thought that God wanted all the Hebrews to marry within our tribe.

Aaron and I figured that since we were also prophets, and we also heard from God, that we had just as much authority as Moses. But after we chastised Moses, God spoke to all three of us together. He pointed out that while he speaks to Aaron and I in dreams, he has appeared to Moses face to face. And so Moses has far greater authority than we do.

To make this lesson perfectly clear to us, I was stricken with leprosy. Fortunately, Moses and Aaron pleaded with God on my behalf, and I only had to suffer for one week, and was then made clean. While I was exiled from the group for my disease, they camped out and waited for

me. I rejoined the group as we journeyed to the promised land, but I would never see that place.

Like both of my brothers, I was buried in the wilderness.

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**DISCUSSION**

What character traits do you see in Miriam that you value?

Where and how do you see God acting in this story?

It's not unusual for women in the Bible to be unnamed. In this story, we don't have names for the midwives, Moses' mother, sister, or even Pharaoh's daughter. We only learn Miriam's name in other stories about her. In fact, we don't even learn Moses' name until the very end of the story, when it's not his mother who names him, but Pharaoh's daughter. But names are important. There's a difference between saying, "Good morning," and "Good morning George," or "Good morning Linda." Come up with some ways you will use names this week to keep things personal.