

Exodus 2 **Miriam**

We've reached the next in our series on children in the Bible and this one is centred around an extraordinary act of bravery.

But let's fill in the background to what's going on.

This takes place after the days of Joseph (of the technicolour coat fame). Joseph invited his family to live in Egypt during the great famine and as a family, and in time a nation, they settled there. History moves on, the Pharaoh changes and the welcome that the people of Israel received vanishes. The ruling powers in Egypt can see that the Israelites are becoming a large people and they view them as a threat. To start off with, the Egyptians enslave the Israelites and put them to work. But the people of Israel keep getting larger.

And so the Pharaoh gives the order. Every new born Israelite baby boy must be killed. It doesn't work. The Israelite midwives refuse to cooperate "We never get there in time" they say. It's the first of a series of brave acts. Pharaoh isn't happy, more Israelites are being born. The next order comes "every new born boy is to be thrown into the river Nile". It's an order for genocide.

And it's into this that characters appear. The parents, Jochabed and Amram, have already had two children – Miriam and Aaron – and now Jochabed gives birth to a new baby boy. The moment that should have given joy is instead a moment of sorrow. How do you hide a baby? I can only imagine that the Pharaoh has given orders for patrols to go round checking on the Israelite people. Any sign of a baby is investigated. Jochebed and Amram know they can hide the new baby for a small amount of time but it will reach a point where they know it's not possible.

I can't imagine the heart breaking decision of having to abandon this child in the river Nile – the River Nile is a dangerous place, but they have no option. But this is where Miriam steps in. It doesn't say whether her mum and dad knew what she was doing but you get the sense that an inbuilt desire to protect is there. Her baby brother is in trouble and she knows that she must do something.

I think we all have that sense sometimes that we need to do something. We don't know what but we know that someone needs to do something about a situation. At points like this we follow the example of Miriam and we wait and watch. In waiting and watching, we open ourselves to seeing what God will do. If Miriam has wandered off, what would have happened? But she waited and she watched.

In the waiting and watching, she sees that hand of God. Down to the water comes the Pharaoh's daughter. Somehow she sees hidden the little basket, she asks a slave to get it and upon opening it she sees the baby crying and she feels sorry for it.

We're going to act out this next bit...

Princess – how would you expect to be treated/spoken to

(bow, grovel, don't speak to unless spoken to...)

Miriam, a slave girl – is it your place to speak to a princess? What could happen to you?

Miriam acts. She has waited and watched and she sees the chance. The Princess has put a foot wrong. She has found a baby Israelite boy and she has felt pity. She should have told someone to get rid of him straight away. But now she is by the river, holding a crying baby who she pities, in front of a whole group of people, any one of whom could have dobbed her in to her father. And what's she going to do with this baby? She can't take him home!

Miriam acting saves the princess's skin and saves her baby brother's skin.

Miriam wouldn't have known how it would all have worked out. But she acted with absolute bravery. Her thought wasn't for her own wellbeing, but rather the good of the other. She waited, she watched, she acted, she thought nothing of her own safety.

As we look with the benefit of hindsight and the full view of scripture, we can see that workings of God in everything. We can see how Moses goes on to become this great leader and his massive part in the story of God's salvation. Miriam didn't have that. She's described elsewhere when she's older as a prophetess but even a prophetess doesn't know everything and they still have to wait and watch.

So, are we people who are brave? Is our first thought of ourselves and our reputation, status, whatever - or are we prepared to take risks for God. It's easy to be risk averse. There's times we want to know all the details in advance and weigh up the pros and cons and the risks involved in an action. None of that is wrong but if we think in God's service we'll have all the answers in advance then we're getting it wrong.

For evil to flourish requires good people to do nothing.

The lesson from Miriam is that we must be people who wait and watch and at the right time we need to act bravely. How will we know the right time? We'll know because we've waited and watched and in those acts God reveals the time to act.

To be honest, when you act you may get thrown to the metaphorical crocodiles. You may not get that happy ending. But in acting bravely and acting for the kingdom of God you play your small part in the bigger picture.

Wait, watch, act bravely and leave everything else to God.