**Service 4 - The birth of Moses prepared by Margaret Roe**

**Call to worship - Psalm 27:1-3**

**Hymn StF 116 Sing for God’s glory, StF 77 Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King** or some other hymn/song of praise

**Opening Prayers**

**A Prayer of Praise**

Lord God we come to praise you for all your goodness to us.

You are a faithful and loving God.

We praise you for your mercies to us which are new every morning.

We praise you for your faithfulness in the seasons and in each new day.

We praise you for the wonders of your world.

But above all we praise you for your great love for us.

A love that never changes even when we fail you.

A love which provides us with all that we need.

A love that protects and guides us.

A love that give us strength and hope.

A love that forgives us.

A love that feeds us with the bread of life.

A love which sent your only Son, our Lord and Saviour,

to live a human life,

to die for us on the cross,

to rise again to new life.

A love which sent your Holy Spirit to be present with us always.

And so we come before you with our praises

for all you have done for us

and for all you will continue to do for us.

In Jesus’ name we pray.

**Amen.**

**A Prayer of Confession**

Think of the times we have failed to live up to our good intentions.

**Lord have mercy**

Think of the things we could or should have done and have not made the time or the effort.

**Lord have mercy**

Think of the ways in which we have hurt others.

**Lord have mercy**

Think of the times when we have ignored God’s prompting.

**Lord have mercy**

The Lord forgives those who truly repent.

Hear then the word of grace

Your sins are forgiven.

**Amen. Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn StF 156 from the breaking of the dawn, StF 628 Faithful one, so unchanging**

or some other hymn/song

**Exodus 1:6-22**

**Introduction**

Many years had passed since Joseph and his brothers settled in Egypt. They eventually became so numerous that the Egyptians were afraid of them and made them slaves, forcing them into hard labour on their massive building projects.

Even that did not satisfy and the Hebrew midwives were told to kill all the male babies.

We hear from one of them how they reacted to that order.

**Shiphrah - The Midwife’s Story**

The women in our community rely on Puah and me.

When someone is sick or has died,

we are called in to do what is needed.

But our main role is as midwives.

We are always called on to help deliver the babies.

It is a wonderful thing to bring new life into the world.

But what sort of a world are we bringing them into?

Are we just helping to bring more slaves into the world for Pharaoh to work to death?

Our Hebrew women are very fertile and there are always plenty of babies to deliver.

So many that Pharaoh was beginning to get anxious that there were too many.

So we were summoned to him and ordered to kill all the boys when we helped with the deliveries.

What an order!

We couldn’t do that.

Our role is to bring a child into the world not destroy it.

Anyway, our God will not allow us to kill and we fear him more than Pharaoh.

We had no intention of carrying out his orders.

A few weeks later we were summoned again.

He knew we had not obeyed him.

What would happen to us?

We tried to convince him that the women were strong and healthy and gave birth before we arrived.

I’m not sure whether he believed us, but it was the best we could do.

He let us go, probably realising he could not stop us.

He found other ways of course.

He gave an order that all the Hebrew baby boys should be thrown into the Nile.

And, yes, some died that way but many of the women went to great lengths to save their children.

I’m sure God has a purpose for his people.

One day we will escape from slavery.

Perhaps one of those young boys whom we saved will help us.

**Comment**

I wonder whether you have ever felt the need to stand up for what you believe to be right even if it means breaking the law or going against the general consensus.

We have seen on the TV many marches by people and protests against what they perceive to be injustice. Would you join such a protest if you felt strongly enough? How do you react to people who go to extremes to protest against what they see as injustices?

**Hymn StF 611 Brother, sister, let me serve you** or some other hymn/song

One boy who was not killed at birth or drowned in the Nile was Moses. We hear the story of his birth.

**Exodus 2:1-10**

We listen to Miriam and Pharoah’s daughter telling their side of the story.

**Miriam - My Baby Brother**

I don’t think the Jewish people realised how important my role was.

After all, if wasn’t for me, Moses might not have lived and been able to rescue our people out of Egypt.

I am a girl, insignificant.

But boys, they are different.

Our people were slaves and the Egyptians needed strong healthy young men to build their cities.

But eventually they were so strong and healthy and numerous that the Egyptians began to see them as a threat.

They wanted the Jewish boys killed.

So they told the Hebrew midwives to kill the boys they delivered.

But they were proud women and would do no such thing.

Then they ordered baby boys to be thrown into the Nile to drown.

Some women were so afraid they obeyed.

But not my mother.

When my little brother was born, she kept him hidden for as long as she could.

But after three months it became impossible.

He had a good pair of lungs and could be heard all over the neighbourhood.

So she made a basket for him, waterproofed it with tar and took it down to the river.

After she had placed the basket securely in the reeds I was despatched to keep watch.

I’m not sure what I was supposed to do.

What if a wind blew the basket over?

What if it was attacked by crocodiles?

What if the current took it down river?

I don’t think I could have done much.

But as I stood in the bushes watching, Pharaoh’s daughter came down with her maids to bathe.

She saw the basket and sent one of her maids to fetch it.

That’s the end of him, I thought.

When she realises it is a Hebrew baby, she will just tip him out of the basket and he will drown in the river.

But no, when he started crying she picked him up and was obviously concerned for him.

It was then that I made a bold move.

Perhaps I could do something to save the situation.

I approached Pharaoh’s daughter with as much bowing and scraping as I could manage.

“Would you like me to fetch a wet nurse for you from among the Hebrew women?” I said.

Surprisingly she agreed and I went to fetch my mother.

I was afraid, then, that she would be taken to the palace and I would not see her or my brother again.

But my plan worked out even better than I had hoped.

She gave him to my mother and paid her to nurse him for her.

So my mother was paid for looking after her own son.

We were both delighted.

We enjoyed his company for a few years.

Eventually, of course, he went to the palace where Pharaoh’s daughter brought him up as her own son.

Moses, she called him.

It had not been our name for him, but that has long been lost in the mists of time.

But he did not forget us.

Our God protected him.

He did great things for his people.

**Pharaoh’s Daughter - The Hebrew Child**

I had a privileged life, I know that.

I could have anything I wanted.

I had female attendants to look after me,

to attend to all my needs.

But I was lonely.

I couldn’t share in their gossip.

Sometimes I would go down to the river to bathe.

I didn’t go alone, of course,

my attendants came with me.

They weren’t permitted to bathe.

They just had to stand or walk along by the river and watch,

have the towels ready for when I came out

and help me to dry and dress.

One day as I went down to the river I heard a baby cry.

Then I noticed the basket in the reeds and realised a baby must be there.

I sent my slave girl to fetch it.

It was a beautiful baby.

I felt sorry for him.

I wanted to keep it.

To have something to love.

But then I realised why it was there.

It must belong to one of the Hebrew women.

My father had ordered that all the boys born to the Hebrew women were to be killed.

The Hebrew slaves were getting too numerous and he was afraid they would rebel or even worse join his enemies if war broke out.

While I was thinking whether it was sensible to keep it,

a young girl appeared from nowhere.

She must have been hiding in the reeds.

Was she guarding the baby or had she been watching us?

She approached me.

She was either very brave or very foolish.

I could have had her killed for daring to speak to me.

She asked me if she should go and find a wet nurse for the child.

I realised then how impracticable it would be for me to have the child.

I had no milk to give it.

This was an answer to my dilemma.

She would find a woman who would care for the baby until he was weaned.

Then he could come to me and be brought up as my son.

The girl soon returned with a woman.

I guessed she was the mother of both the baby and the girl.

I felt sorry for them.

The prospect of your baby being killed must be awful.

I would save this one.

I gave the child to her to care for until he was weaned.

I also gave her some money to nurse him for me.

Perhaps there was a purpose in this child living when so many of the other Hebrew boys had been killed.

When the child was weaned the woman brought him to me.

He grew up in the royal household, my adopted son.

I wonder if one day he will want to return to his own people.

**Comment**

I have often wondered what Pharoah’s daughter’s motives were. Was she just concerned for the plight of the baby? Did she really want a child of her own? Had she considered the practicalities of looking after a baby who would need feeding? Had she considered the consequences of adopting a child who was of a different race? I’m sure she would have known he was one of the Hebrew babies whose death her father had ordered. What did her father think about it?

They are questions we can’t answer. Sometimes we want to help in a difficult situation: an abandoned child, someone made homeless, refugees. Many people in Britian opened their homes to Ukrainian refugees a few years ago. Some have gone back to Ukraine, some have found new homes in Britian, some are still with their hosts. People want to help but it is not always easy and not always possible to know how the future will pan out.

And what about Miriam and her mother? How did they feel? Miriam had great foresight in offering her mother as a wet-nurse but what of the future? They knew they would lose Moses after he was weaned. Can we sympathise with mothers today who have had to give up their children? In the 50s and 60s many single mothers were forced to give up their children for adoption. And many of those mothers and children have in recent years tried to find their children or parents. We do know that Miriam was reunited with Moses as an adult when he led his people out of Egypt. She led the women in singing and dancing after they crossed the Red Sea. But there must have been anxiety over what was to become of him.

And it is also worth considering Moses. What might it have been like for Moses growing up in the royal household? How might that have influenced the person he grew up to be? He certainly knew his background for he was concerned for his people who were being ill-treated. And an educated background might have helped him later to lead his people out of slavery.

**Hymn StF 120 We gladly celebrate and praise, StF 519 Father, I place into your hands** or some other suitable hymn/song

**Prayers of intercession**

As we think of the story of Moses’ birth we pray especially for mothers for whom motherhood has brought problems and difficulties.

We pray for mothers who have had to give up their children, either because they were forced to or because they were unable to look after them.

We pray for mothers who fear for the safety of their children – those affected by war or famine or violence.

We pray for those who take on the responsibility of looking after children who are not their own, adoptive and foster parents, those who work in children’s homes.

May they know the peace and love of God in their lives and receive the strength they need to cope.

Lord in your mercy – **Hear our prayer**

We pray for all involved in the lives of children, midwives and community nurses, child-minders, play group and pre-school leaders, teachers and youth leaders, child psychologists, social workers and support workers.

We pray that they may have a positive influence on the children in their care as they grow.

Lord in your mercy – **Hear our prayer**

And we pray for the needs of the world

*You may like to include your own prayers for situations in the world and this country today – places where there is war, famine or natural disaster, political upheaval or uncertainty.*

And we pray for those who need our prayers today – those living in poverty, those struggling with health issues, the lonely, the anxious, the bereaved.

*You may like to include or allow space for prayers for people known to the congregation*.

Loving God, we thank you that you hear all our prayers which we ask in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Offertory**

**Hymn StF 81 Now thank we all our God** or some other hymn/song

Either

**Blessing** – The blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be with you all evermore. Amen.

**or say the grace together – The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.**