

August 16, 2026
Rev. Lisa Schrott
Psalm 124 & Exodus 1:15-2:10
Delivered From & Delivered For

As we continue sharing some of the great stories of our faith, we are in the first chapter of the book of Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament. The last two weeks, Aaron shared the story of Joseph, of his desolation after the actions of his brothers and finding consolation in God and transformation through grace. We left Joseph last week after he reunited with his family who had migrated to Egypt where Joseph now resided.

The book of Exodus opens after Joseph's death, with a recognition that Hebrews had increased in number so much that the Egyptian powers were afraid. The powers feared that if there was a war, the Israelites might side with an enemy. The new Egyptian king did not know or recognize the gifts that Joseph had brought to the people of Egypt and began to deal harshly with Israelites, treating them as an enslaved people rather than refugees. We pick up the story here as the Pharaoh has some other ideas about how to keep the Hebrew population under control. Hear these words from Exodus chapter 1 beginning at verse 15:

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live."

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 he became her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." **The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

I imagine in my mind's eye, Miriam the know-it-all older sister teasing Moses as they walked through the desert many years later. You haven't heard the story – wait... let me tell you about Moses' birth, Miriam tells the stranger who joined them on the journey. And then there were the days she would goad one of the children..."Ask Moses about his birth. Just ask him about how he was saved by the midwives and how he was hidden. And then ask him how I kept him connected to his Hebrew roots when Pharaoh's daughter found him. Yes, Moses delivered us from our enslavement in Egypt, but you have me to thank for delivering Moses' back into our mother's arms," Miriam would recount.

Every great hero needs a origin story worthy of the acclaim. And Moses, the great deliver of the Hebrew people, surely has one. Even those of us ordinary folk have stories to tell around our births. My dad was fond of sharing that on the day I was born, the Pittsburgh Pirates beat the Los Angeles Dodgers in a doubleheader, defeating two of the greatest pitchers of that era – Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale.¹ Is it any wonder I was a bigtime Pirate fan as a child?

In the book of Exodus, Moses is in the spotlight, deservedly so. Next week, we will hear about one of his dramatic encounters with God. In the stories of our faith, it is hard to top Moses for the sheer number of events in which his leadership mattered, and mattered greatly. He is the great deliverer – the one delivering the oppressed from freedom; the one delivering the great covenant, the Ten Commandments, to the people; the one delivering the people to the edge of Canaan, what was to be their new home.

And yet as Exodus opens, scripture recognizes that Moses' ability to deliver freedom and community to the Hebrews was dependent on his literal deliverance by others. Yes, Moses was delivered from early death as an infant so that he might deliver the Hebrew people. But what about those who delivered Moses? What were they delivered from?

Shiphrah and Puah, Moses' mother and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter all have a role in delivering Moses to health and safety. We will come back to Shiphrah and Puah in a moment, as I want to focus first on the three unnamed women. While unnamed in this passage, these three remarkable women were delivered from anonymity to serve key roles in the life of

¹ Confirmed on the internet! <https://www.baseball-reference.com/boxes/PIT/PIT196509011.shtml> and <https://www.baseball-reference.com/boxes/PIT/PIT196509012.shtml>

Moses and the Hebrew people. We learn more about these unnamed women in the Hebrew Midrash, the ancient commentary on the Hebrew scriptures. The Midrash is attached to the particular text and often read and studied with it. As rabbis engage with the text, they ask questions of it, providing interpretations that stand alongside the traditional understanding. These questions often bring new perspectives and new life to texts that have been heard many times before – making them truly the stories of our faith.

I have already shared that Moses' sister is named Miriam. We learn of her name in later scriptures. In our passage this morning, she displays keen observation skills, creativity, and bravery. She is delivered from being a silent child on the sidelines. She is delivered for a profound moment of speaking up and speaking out words of wisdom and cunning. She watches from a distance to see what happens to Moses after their mother puts him in a basket and puts the basket into the reed-filled water. Miriam watches as the daughter of Pharaoh takes the infant Moses from the basket. And then she speaks out – she a child, speaks out to an elder from the power structure who was oppressing her people, saying 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. The Midrash refers to Miriam as a prophet for her intervention in saving Moses. Miriam becomes a worship leader to the people, leading them in song following the successful passage through the Red Sea, as we hear in Exodus 15. The Midrash also refers to Miriam as an integral member of the Moses-Aaron-Miriam leadership triumvirate.² Like all of us, Miriam's life and leadership was not all smooth sailing and it had its bumps in the road. Yet she rose to the occasion to serve God when needed. Much like Moses, Miriam was delivered for a purpose, for her voice to be heard; to speak up and speak out.

Jochebed is the name of Moses' mother. We learn of this in a genealogy in Exodus chapter 6 where she is listed as the wife of Amram and the mother of Moses and Aaron. We don't know much about Jochebed, except that her name in Hebrew means "Yahweh is Glory" and the writer of the book of Hebrews mentions her as a pillar of faith in Chapter 11. In our text this morning, we see her as a beautiful example of the vulnerability to love. Rather than putting him to death, Moses' mother raised him for as long she could hide him. And when she could no longer hide him, she put her beloved child in a basket and placed the basket among the reeds on the bank of the river. She put her trust in God. And God intervened through the actions of Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter, as Jochebed was delivered from the fate of losing her child. She was delivered from hopelessness to possibility when Miriam's bravery and wisdom reunited her with her child and Jochebed was able to raise Moses in his early years. Although the psalms had not yet been written, I can imagine Jochebed reciting something similar to the words of Psalm 124 to young Moses: "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side—let Israel now say- if it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive ...Our help is in the name

² Tamar Meir. "Miriam: Midrash and Aggadah." *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/miriam-midrash-and-aggadah>.

of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Words that Moses would come to know deep in his soul. Jochebed was delivered for a purpose, to nurture Moses in the faith and instill in him a love for the Hebrew people and the willingness to sacrifice for their survival.³

And then there is Pharaoh's daughter. Our scriptures leave her as an unnamed woman of compassion, righteousness and just treatment. Not only does she respond to the cries of a needy infant, she responds positively to Miriam's suggestion of having a Hebrew woman nurse the infant. And she pays for this care. Hebrew tradition depict the daughter of Pharaoh “as a righteous figure who did not follow her father's wicked ways, but rather converted and ceased worshipping idols. By miraculously rescuing Moses, she was inadvertently responsible for the redemption of Israel, for which she was rewarded with a new name, Bithiah (daughter of God), identifying her with the genealogy in Chronicles. She was highly praised by the Rabbis, and the midrash includes her among the devout women converts and those who entered the Garden of Eden while still alive.”⁴ The daughter of Pharaoh was delivered from a world that relied on and operated through means of oppression. And she was delivered for a purpose - that others might be freed and redeemed.

That leaves us with our two named Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. The story of the Hebrew midwives has a rich tradition in the Jewish Midrash. One Midrash commentary about their story reminds the reader that the midwives “did not do as the king of Egypt had spoken to them; they let the boys live.” The Midrash then asks “...why it was necessary to write “they let the boys live,” if Scripture already stated that the midwives did not do the king of Egypt's bidding? The rabbis answer the verses teach that not only did the midwives not kill the boys, but they also actively aided them to live. It explains that if the midwives saw poor women, they would go and collect food and water from the houses of wealthy women, which they gave to the poor ones, thus enabling them to provide for their children.”⁵

The Midrash praises Shiphrah and Puah for engaging in civil disobedience, defying the king and allowing the male Hebrew offspring to survive and even thrive. And it is not just the ancient Midrash, but also many contemporary commentators who have noted the irony of females outwitting the king, a king who believed that by killing off the male offspring, he would be decreasing the power of the Israelites. The king, who interestingly is not named although the Hebrew midwives are, doesn't seem to grasp the basic tenet of population control that fewer males are needed than females to sustain and grow the population. Shiphrah and Puah were delivered from the fear of punishment for defying Pharaoh. And they were delivered into the grace and freedom that come from fear – or awe – of the Lord God.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jochebed>; Tamar Kadari "Jochebed: Midrash and Aggadah." *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/jochebed-midrash-and-aggadah>.

⁴ Tamar Kadari. "Daughter of Pharaoh: Midrash and Aggadah." *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*. 27 February 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/daughter-of-pharaoh-midrash-and-aggadah>

⁵ Tamar Kadari. "Shiphrah: Midrash and Aggadah." *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*. 31 December 1999. Jewish Women's Archive. <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/shiphrah-midrash-and-aggadah>.

In her book *A is for Alabaster, 52 Reflections on the Stories of Scripture*, Rev. Dr. Anna Carter Florence lifts up Shiphrah and Puah as metaphors for people of faith – midwives who fear God. She says that a *midwife who fears God* is “A person who is prepared to walk hand in hand with others who are laboring. ...What if that is what we are supposed to be for one another, in these days? What if that is what we are supposed to be for the church, the nations, the earth itself? What if everything that is waiting to be born in you and in me is totally dependent on our willingness to walk with one another, behind the scenes, as a witness and another set of hands.”⁶

Our willingness to walk with one another. To be another set of hands. Isn't that what we do as siblings in Christ? We are delivered from our selfishness and our one-upmanship and our what's in it for me-ness and delivered for caring and serving each other.

At the urging of a number of you in the congregation, I have just read the most lovely book *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi. For those who haven't read it, don't worry, I won't give anything significant away. It is a book that speaks about the beauty of walking with each other through the ups and downs of life via literal deliveries of hand drawn portraits. At its heart, it is a book that speaks to deliverance. Deliverance from past pains and deliverance for brighter futures. Deliverance from misunderstandings and misappropriations and deliverance for bridging divides. Deliverance from being unknown and unseen to deliverance that forms community. That we can all be delivered from histories and experiences that constrict our hearts and narrow our understanding of neighbor. And that we are delivered for something more. The book speaks to the small, sometimes barely visible ways, we are knit together. We are delivered to be part of a bigger story. A story of redemptive sacrifice and love.

This is the story our scripture share this morning. Shiphrah, Puah, Moses' mother and sister and Pharaoh's daughter help us recognize that no matter how minor a character we play in the story, our role and our deepest reward is having a sense of that larger story. This larger story – the story of our faith – gives us a sense of hope and a sense of a greater purpose. That we are delivered from whatever is holding us back from opening our arms in love. That we are delivered – each one of us - for a purpose, to work to bring the kingdom of God a little closer, by being present with each other in joy and hardship and on the ordinary days of life. Join me in prayer.

⁶ Anna Carter Florence in *A is for Alabaster, 52 Reflections on the Stories of Scripture*, 2023, p64-67.