

I know some people watch scary movies from behind the sofa or from between their fingers but do you ever follow the news in that way? Do you ever feel the sense of fear or dread as you listen to the news.

Just last weekend North Korea was testing rocket engines presumably to transport their nuclear warheads and the US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson seemed to be ruling armed action in as a possibility. Meanwhile troops from the UK were heading to Estonia to help combat the threat of Russian action there. We see the power of nations being set against each other and we feel fearful. As we come on this Mothering Sunday to look at Exodus 2:1-10 what we see here is that it is the promise keeping God who rules over the nations. However that may not be immediately obvious as the word God does not appear in our passage.

Just to quickly waggle on the tee and give us the context. God's people under Joseph had gone to Egypt during a period of famine. They grew numerically (1:7) and as such were a threat to their Egyptian hosts.

So firstly they enslaved the people of God and v14 "used them ruthlessly".

Then the decree went out from Pharaoh that baby boys were to be killed (1:15) and eventually (1:22) that all Hebrew baby boys were to be thrown in the river at birth.

This is where we come to our passage for today and we probably should watch this from behind the sofa. The question is where is God in all this? After all it was God who led his people to Egypt as we see in Gen 50:20, where Joseph speaking to his brothers about how they all got to Egypt said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

So now what was going on and where is God?

### **1. The maternal instinct**

So v1-2 this couple, whom we know from later to be Amram and Jochebed come together and have a baby and it's a boy. This is where the maternal instinct kicked in because "when she saw he was a fine child she hid him for three months" (v2). It seems very callous to say that had the child been sickly perhaps she would not have acted this way but the baby was healthy and her maternal instinct to care for him and protect him came in. It is hard to imagine what it was like. The birth of a baby should be a joy but here it just brought fear. Fear that soldiers might find him or neighbours tell on them. Each time the baby cried must have been a point of extra tension. But Jochebed was not prepared to give him up. That is what mother's do isn't it? They don't give up on their children. They will fight all the way for their children. If you have been privileged to be a mother perhaps you can

recall situations where you have had to fight for your child. Or, putting the boot on the other foot, perhaps you can remember a time when your mother fought for your well being.

However, v3 it all became a bit too fraught and so plan b was put into action. Pharaoh (1:22) had decreed that every baby boy should be thrown into the Nile and so Jochebed does what she was required to do. Nobody said the child could not be put into a basket! She got a papyrus basket.

The only other time those words are used it is of Noah's ark and we are meant to see the link between the two as God rescues his people through a frail craft in destructive waters.

The ark with the child in (v3) was placed in the reeds at the side of the river Nile.

Then v5 the daughter of the Pharaoh comes along saw the basket and had it brought to her.

She opened the basket saw the crying baby. She recognised him as a Hebrew baby (6) and rather than tip the child into the river as her father wished, she "felt sorry for him". Is that not also a maternal instinct albeit she was not the natural mother but later to be the adoptive mother?

We might sing "can a woman's tender care cease towards the child she bare?" but here we see that it is not just that natural mother who has strong maternal feelings.

We have some friends who while having their own children have also fostered others and the care and love they have given to those children has been amazing.

But the thing we see in these verses on this Mother's day is the natural maternal instinct of a mother to protect her child and then the maternal instinct of what will be the adoptive mother where her heart goes out to the needs of child not her own.

As we see the baby's older sister Miriam had been given a watching brief and v7 dashed up and offered to go and get a "Hebrew woman to nurse the baby".

As a result Jochebed was able to nurse her own baby. More than that v9 the one who had to give her baby up was paid to bring him up! We know being a mother is a fulltime job and Jochebed was paid to do it.

## **2. the child born to be a rescuer**

As interesting as this story is we do have to ask why is it here in Scripture? Surely there were plenty of children who somehow managed to avoid the death penalty. The answer of course lies in the role for which God was sending this baby, as we see in 3:7-10.

This child was sent to be the one through whom God would deliver his people from slavery.

Even as I say it I am sure that the words ring bells in connection with the birth of another child whose birth brought a strong reaction from the ruler of the day and that is Jesus. We see from Matthew how Herod sought to kill all the boys who had been born in Bethlehem.

We need to stop and recognise that in both cases the lives of these two boys born centuries apart but both born to act as rescuers hang by a very fine thread. How very vulnerable they were and yet God's plan for the rescue of his people was wholly centred in them.

This is why their mothers were so important. Jochebed's courage and cunning helped to ensure the survival of Moses and Mary's willingness to submit to God's will was central to the birth of Jesus. There are plenty of mother's through history who made their own mark on history, women like Emily Pankhurst, Queen Elizabeth II and so on but then there are many who are known for their children such as Mary Arden who became Mark Shakespeare and Morrow Franklin mother of Billy Graham.

Whether we grow up to be great rescuers or just pretty ordinary Vicars we owe a debt of gratitude to our mothers and fathers for the sacrifices they made for us. Jochebed made that sacrifice first of hiding her son at threat to her own life, then seeking a way to save him and then finally v10 handing him over to another person to look after, how hard must that have been.

I don't suppose Jochebed had any idea at the time what Moses would go on to do any more than Mary Arden or Morrow Franklin. For Jochebed the plans God had for her son were unknown and that leads us to the final and main point

### **3. the God of faithfulness**

You may have noted that there is no mention of God in these verses. However we would be foolish if we thought that God is not in this story. The Bible after all is God's story and God's finger prints are all over these events but that can only be seen after the events have happened.

As we read the events from behind the sofa fearing the worst for this baby we are not necessarily able to see what God was about. However from our standpoint in history we can see that here again as so often in the Bible we see how God's unstoppable plan was being worked out.

We read 1:11, "So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labour", we read 1:22, "Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live" and we see where the power lies and we wonder how can God's people survive? We are back behind the sofa. We dread what might happen.

However God was at work and his power was unstoppable. He had promised Abraham a place a people and a presence and God is working that out. The book of Exodus is central to this plan of God. We see here in 1:5 that there were 70 of them when they came to Egypt. Even Kettering get more than that. It can hardly be described as a people more a big family. However v7 "the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous so that the land was filled with them." Now they were a people but they were not in their land and the rest of Exodus takes us

towards that goal and as it does so we see God's presence with his people at first in the pillar of cloud and fire and then in his presence in the tabernacle.

What we see is God's unstoppable plan being worked out and it all centred upon this one very fragile baby.

What hope one baby against the might of Pharaoh? But see how God works out his plan. First through his mother who protects the child. Then Pharaoh's daughter just happens to come along. She rather than following her father's wishes just decides to take on this Hebrew baby. But she is happy to give him back to a Hebrew woman where Moses learnt about "the God of our fathers" (3:15) before being taken into the royal court where he learnt about the workings of that court. See how God worked these things through. It is true Moses was a flawed rescuer but what we see from our standpoint in history is God's unstoppable plan for the salvation of his people being worked out.

However, that is a sense is one of the problems that we as humans face in that God's purposes are often hidden from our eyes and we have to trust that he is at work even when we cannot see or when God seems silent.

I remember as I was going through a serious problem in my life some friends sent me this poem which I think originated with Corrie ten Boom,

"My life is but a weaving between my God and me.

I cannot choose the colours He weaveth steadily.

some times He weaveth sorrow; And I in foolish pride

Forget He sees the upper And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly

Will God unroll the canvas and reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hand

As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

He knows, He loves, He cares; Nothing this truth can dim.

He gives the very best to those Who leave the choice to Him."

We are not always privileged to see what God is doing. I wonder if Jochebed gave God short shrift as she put Moses into the river or if she prayed a prayer of trust believing God to be able to keep him.

Certainly she was a person of faith as we read in Heb 11:23 "By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict".

God is a powerful God but he is also a faithful God. He is mighty to save but he is also loving in the way he deals with us his people.

We may not always understand why God allows things to happen or not happen but we are called to trust him and to trust his promises to us that, "in all things God works for the good of those who love him." (Romans 8:28).

We do not see all clearly but God calls us to trust

John Paton was a Christian missionary. In 1858 he and his young pregnant wife went to the primitive Island of Tanna in the New Hebrides. During the first year she died of fever. This was followed seventeen days later by the death of their one-month-old son. Grief-stricken, John Paton buried his wife and child. He recorded these words:

"It was very difficult to be resigned, left alone, and in sorrowful circumstances; but feeling immovably assured that my God and Father was too wise and loving to err in anything that He does or permits, I looked up to the Lord for help, and struggled on in His work. I do not pretend to see through the mystery of such visitations - wherein God calls away the young, the promising, and those sorely needed for His service here; but this I do know and feel, that, in the light of such dispensations, it becomes us all to love and serve our blessed Lord Jesus so that we may be ready at His call for death and Eternity."

Isn't that amazing and while we may not go through such suffering we can learn from that example of trust. It is a trust I see in Jochebed as she placed Moses in that basket, that ark, on the edge of the river and it was a trust greatly vindicated by God through Moses life and ministry.

The mother's faith in God was a great influence on her son but more, through him, a great influence on God's people under the powerful hand of God.

So on this mother's day there is a message for all of us about trust in God who is at work even though at times he may seem silent and absent. At those times when we are viewing our life or circumstances from behind the sofa we need the reminder that God is there even if we cannot really see his hand and we need to cling on to him in faith.