

First Presbyterian Church  
Greenfield, Indiana  
Pastor John J. Paulson

August 21, 2011

10<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

**A New Era Begins!**

Exodus 1: 8 – 2:10

A future leader is born!

Psalms 124: 1 – 8

God is with us!

Matthew 16: 13 – 20

Who is Jesus?

Romans 12: 1 – 8

Serving God, using God's gifts!

*Informally before the sermon: As our story of God's chosen people continues, God's people are in serious trouble. No question about it; they are now enslaved by the Egyptians and being forced into hard labor. The safe harbor in Egypt, which began so wonderfully when Joseph and the Pharaoh invited all the Hebrew clan to live in Egypt, has ended. Life is becoming unbearable. Babies are being killed, food is scarce, it could be the end of this close-knit group of Abraham's descendents. But, it is not because, as we will see, God works through many people in preserving the nation of Israel.*

**Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer! Amen**

If you remember, the story of the Hebrew's in Egypt began with the celebration of a family reunion. The happy day when a young man named Joseph, Jacob's second youngest son, was the favorite of the Pharaoh. Together they, with the help of God, relocated Jacob's entire family from Canaan to Egypt. Jacob had been chosen by God to carry on the promises that God had made to Abraham and Isaac; the promises that their descendents would be as numerous as the stars and would carry God's name far and wide into the world. God is deeply involved in the life of this family, and has even changed Jacob's name from Jacob to Israel; the name that would be given to the nation that grew out of God's grace.

Jacob's twelve sons and their wives and children were invited to leave the famine in Canaan, bring all their possessions and livestock, and settle in Egypt where there was plenty of food and fertile land for farming and grazing.

For many years these living conditions work well. The Hebrews remain a closed society, marrying only with others who share their faith, telling and retelling the old family stories about Creation and sin and the flood. They were educating their children about God, and worshipping their God, and God is blessing them.

The new patriarch of the family, Jacob, ages peacefully in the new surroundings, and, dies in his old age. Jacob has the respect of all the Hebrew people, and after he dies, all the Hebrew adults take a trip from Egypt to bury Jacob in the land of Canaan. Only the children and livestock are left behind. The Hebrews are accompanied by Joseph's friends, the dignitaries of Egypt and the dignitaries of Pharaoh's court. The Bible describes it as a very large company of people. When they reach the place of burial, they observe seven days of mourning, then all return to Egypt. All is well. God's people are thriving.

As time passes, the Pharaoh who recognized Joseph's administrative and leadership talents dies and is replaced, and Joseph dies as well. Approximately seventy years have passed since the Hebrews moved to Egypt. And during that time the future nation of Israel continues to grow and thrive. In fact, it grows so strong within the Egyptian borders that the potential power of the people comes to the attention of the Pharaoh who is now in charge. He comes to the realization that this large foreign presence living within Egypt's borders poses a threat to his power and to his country. Even though they have been living in the country for many years, the Hebrews are not Egyptian citizens. They retain their identity as Jews. It appears no leader comes forward to replace Joseph and interface with the Egyptian leadership. The Jews are isolated, almost like living on an island in the middle of the sea with a typhoon coming, they are vulnerable.

Pharaoh concludes that if there is a war, the Hebrews might join with the enemies of Egypt to overthrow the country. God's people are in trouble! They hold no political power in the country. They don't vote, well, probably nobody votes. They stand out. They are readily identifiable by their conservative way of dressing; they practice religious celebrations that seem strange to the Egyptians, and they worship a God that the Egyptians do not recognize.

The Pharaoh has absolute power in the country and he uses it to try to solve what he perceives as the Jewish problem for once and for all. Eventually he finds, as Adolph Hitler was to find in Germany in the 1930's and 40's, God's people are strong and resilient; after all, they have the support of the one true God with them. But, that's getting ahead of our story.

The Pharaoh issues orders designed to stop the growth of the Hebrew people; he orders that Hebrews be enslaved. Slave masters are appointed over them and they are force into hard labor. They work the fields. As slaves usually are, they are mistreated as

they do the menial tasks that need to be performed. The back-breaking work that the Egyptians feel is beneath them. They are forced to make bricks and build storehouses. Their freedom is taken away. The writer of Exodus tells us that “They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.”<sup>1</sup>

And, if that wasn't enough, Pharaoh orders that all the boy babies born to Jewish women are to be immediately killed by the midwives. How ruthless can it get? Can't God step in and help?

And God does. The two midwives who attend Jewish births refuse to obey Pharaoh's orders. These two seemingly insignificant women make a difference. All we know about them is their names: Shiphrah and Puah. We don't know if they are Hebrews or Egyptians. We don't know how old they are; we only know that they disobey Pharaoh and singlehandedly play a part in saving the nation of Israel.

Because of their actions, boy babies continue to be born and the Hebrew population continues to grow. Pharaoh is upset; why do Hebrew baby boys continue to live? He calls in the midwives who tell him that the Hebrew women are different than Egyptian women. When a birth is eminent and the midwife is called to come quickly, the baby is born before she gets there. That must have taken guts for the women to tell that story to Pharaoh. But he listened and didn't take any action against the two midwives. Perhaps the Hebrews were so despised by the Egyptians that these are the only two women who will assist them in childbirth. Perhaps God is providing special protection to these two. We don't know. Looking back, we can clearly see that God is at work.

Then Pharaoh gives even harsher orders, this time he orders that all baby boys born to the Hebrews are to be thrown into the Nile river. This order bypasses the midwives and is directed to all the Egyptian people.

Now we come to birth of one of the great heroes of Israel, Moses.

A baby boy is born to a couple who were of the family of Levi, one of Jacob's twelve sons. As all Israeli families must be doing, the baby's parents want to protect him from the orders that Pharaoh has issued. So, they hide him the best they can in their household.

The fact that he was born to a Levite family is significant. Eventually the descendents of Levi will become the priests and they will be the tribe responsible for the

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 1:14 (NIV)

tabernacle and the performance of the Jewish rituals; they will be the ones who conduct the sacrifices and serve the Lord and only the Lord. Among the chosen people they are singled out for special duties by God.

After three months of hiding, the baby's mother comes up with an idea to save the baby's life. Here we find another case of God working through ordinary people to accomplish God's plan. This Levite woman, a normal woman performs an extraordinary service for God and her people. She knows the routine of the Pharaoh's daughter; she knows that at daybreak on most days of the week she goes to the Nile to bathe. With some tar, she waterproofs a straw basket and one morning before daybreak, tenderly places her baby boy in the basket. Along with her teen age daughter, another unnamed heroine, she carries the basket and the baby down to the shore of the Nile, and hides it in the reeds near the spot where the Egyptian princess and her entourage were expected to come to bathe.

Leaving her daughter to see what happens, she returns home, wondering if she will ever see her son again. I am sure she is praying and asking God to protect the boy, and God does.

The princess, Pharaoh's daughter, hears cries coming from the basket and sends one of her slaves to see what it is. It is, as we know, the basket with the Hebrew baby in it. Cute babies have a way of getting our attention and having us fall in love with them, and this baby and the princess are no exception. We can see her picking the baby up from the basket and cuddling him. His smile and giggling as she holds him are infectious. She knows her father's orders, but this baby is just too cute! She cannot let this baby suffer those consequences. But, what can she do? She can't care for a three month old baby who still needs to be nursed. She can't take him back to the palace; somebody will surely notice that it is a Hebrew baby boy and his fate will be quickly decided. As she stands there holding the baby close to her, she notices the teen ager standing there and the teen quickly asks if she can be of any help. In fact, she offers to find a Hebrew woman who will care for the boy for a few years until it is safe for him to be brought back to her. The girl runs off and returns with her mother, the baby's real mother, who offers to nurse him for the princess; amazingly, the princess even pays her to do this. The baby's life is saved. God is working.

After a few years, the baby, now a young boy, is returned to the princess who raises him as her son in the palace of the Pharaoh. She names the boy Moses. A name that means "draw out" since she drew him out of the river.

God is at work. God is going to save the nation of Israel. Not immediately, but eventually. God has not and will not ever forget the promises made to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God will provide a savior for the people.

And, that savior is the promised Messiah that we know as Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The saving grace of God, that began almost the moment that the world was created, continues to today as we have the opportunity to agree with Peter. "Who do people say I am", asked Jesus. The disciples replied: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

Then, looking the disciples right in the eyes, Jesus asks point blank: "what about you? Who do you say I am." These men who have been walking with him, hearing him preach, seeing him heal, watching him love the unlovable stand there with blank looks on their faces. They really haven't thought about their individual, personal feelings. Each one of the twelve is thinking, "what should I say? What does he want to hear? he didn't respond to Elijah or John the Baptist or Jeremiah one of the other prophets. Who could he be?"

Then Peter has a brainstorm. Peter the often bumbling fisherman. Another common person being used by God to change the world. The idea jumps into his mind as he puts all of this together, Jesus has to be the Messiah promised in the writings of the prophets to bring salvation to all people.

And he says: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus says, you are right!

Amen

This is the story of a boy named Moses,  
Born to a Levite, born to lead.

This is the story of a boy named Moses,  
Born to a Jew, left in a river.

Found by a princess, returned to his mother,  
Raised by his mother as a Jew  
Given back to the princess.

Raised by the Princess as an Egyptian prince.

This is the story of a boy named Moses.  
Born to lead; born to serve God.

This is the story of a boy named Moses,  
Born to save the chosen people.

Born to serve the one true God.

This is the story of a boy named Moses.

Joseph (37:1-50:26)

1. Early life (37:1-36)

a. Favoritism (37:1-4)

b. Joseph's dreams (37:5-11)

c. Capture and selling of Joseph (37:12-36)

2. Excursus: Judah and Tamar (38:1-30)

3. Joseph's rise to power in Egypt (39:1-41:57)

a. Joseph's experiences in Potiphar's household (39:1-18)

b. Joseph confined to prison (39:19-23)

c. Joseph interprets dreams (40:1-23)

d. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams (41:1-36)

e. Joseph elevated to power (41:37-57)

4. Joseph in power in Egypt (42:1-50:26)

a. Joseph's brothers' first trip to Egypt (42:1-38)

b. Joseph's brothers' second trip to Egypt (43:1-34)

c. Testing of the brothers (44:1-34)

d. Joseph revealed (45:1-15)

e. Jacob invited to come to Egypt (45:16-28)

f. Jacob comes to Egypt (46:1-7)

g. Names of those who came (46:8-27)

h. Reunion of Jacob and Joseph (46:28-34)

i. Jacob and Pharaoh (47:1-12)

j. Joseph's famine policies (47:13-26)

5. Deaths of Jacob and Joseph (47:27-50:26)

a. Jacob prepares to die (47:27-31)

b. Jacob blesses Joseph's sons (48:1-22)

c. Jacob blesses his sons (49:1-27)

d. Death of Jacob (49:28-33)

e. Burial of Jacob (50:1-14)

f. Uneasy reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers (50:15-21)

g. Joseph's last words and death (50:22-26)

**I. The Hebrews in Egypt (1:1-12:36)**

**A. Progressive mistreatment of the Hebrew slaves (1:1-22)**

**1. The tribes of Israel identified (1:1-7)**

**2. Pharaoh (King of Egypt) who knew not Joseph (1:8)**

**3. Growth of Hebrew population (1:9-10)**

**4. Harsh treatment of Hebrew slaves in Egypt (1:11-14)**

**5. Plan to destroy the Hebrews (1:15-22)**

**B. Preparation for deliverance of Hebrew slaves (2:1-4:31) Acts 7:20-50 Account in Stephen's preaching showing again the importance of preaching the Old Testament!**

**1. Moses born and saved from destruction (2:1-10)**

2. Moses kills an Egyptian and forsakes Egypt (2:11-14)

3. Moses in the land of Midian (2:15-22)

4. God takes knowledge of Israel's sad plight (2:23-25)

5. God calls Moses at a burning bush (3:1-4:17)

6. Moses agrees to go back to Egypt (4:18-26)

7. The Hebrews believe Moses and accept his leadership (4:27-31)

C. The Israelites delivered from Egyptian bondage (5:1-15:21)

1. Moses demands the release of the Israelites (5:1-4)

2. Hebrews denied straw with which to make bricks (5:5-23)

3. Moses demand certified by miracle (5:24-7:12)

4. Pharaoh's heart was hardened (7:13-14)

5. First plague: Blood (7:14-25)

6. Second plague: Frogs (8:1-15)

7. Third plague: Lice (8:16-19)

8. Fourth plague: Flies (8:20-32)

9. Fifth plague: Disease on Livestock (9:1-7)

10. Sixth plague: Boils (9:8-12)

11. Seventh plague: Hail (9:13-35)

12. Eighth plague: Locusts (10:1-20)

13. Ninth plague: Darkness (10:21-29)

14. Death announced (11:1-10)

D. Israel redeemed by the blood of a lamb -- Passover. (12:1-13:16) Christ is our sacrifice  
Hebrews 10:4-10

1. Beginning of the year is changed (12:1-2)
2. Passover instituted (12:3-20)
3. Procedure for Passover ceremony (12:21-30)
4. Unleavened bread (12:31-39)
5. Death of the firstborn (12:40-42)
6. Passover to be observed annually (12:43-50)
7. Israelites driven out of the land of Egypt (12:51)
8. Firstborn sanctified to God (13:1-2)
9. Deliverance to be remembered (13:3-10)
10. Firstling of animals (13:11-13)
11. A sign to future generations (13:14-16)
- E. Israel crosses Red Sea; is saved from the Egyptian army (13:17-15:22)
  1. Led to the banks of the Red Sea (13:17-18)
  2. Bones of Joseph carried with them (13:19) Genesis 50:24-25
  3. Pillar of cloud and fire (13:20-22)
  4. Egyptian army destroyed in the Red Sea (14:1-31)
  5. Song of deliverance (15:1-22)

## **II. The Hebrews in the Wilderness (15:23-18:27)**

- A. Bitter water made sweet (15:23-27)
- B. Manna from heaven (16:1-36)
- C. Water miraculously supplied at Rephidim (17:1-7)
- D. War with Amalek (17:18-16)
- E. Israel organized according to the advice of Jethro (18:1-27)

## **III. The Hebrews at Sinai (19:1-40:38)**

- A. Revelation of the covenant between God and Israel (19:1-25) Colossians 2:14
  1. People come to Sinai (19:1-2)
  2. Demonstration of God's power (19:3-25) Hebrews 4:12-13 and Romans 1:16 – His Word is Power
- B. Commandments (20:1-26)
  1. Ten commandments (20:1-17)
  2. Idolatry forbidden (20:18-23)
  3. Instructions about building an altar (20:24-26)

C. Various laws (21:1-23:33)

1. Menservants (21:1-6)
2. Womenservants (21:7-11)
3. Murder and manslaughter (21:12-15)
4. Menstealers (21:16)
5. Treatment of parents (21:17)
6. Social regulations (21:18-22:15)
7. Moral regulations (22:16-23:9)
8. Sabbath rules (23:10-13) Our day of worship is Sunday Acts 20:7
9. Feasts and sacrifice (23:14-19) Our instructions for the Lord's Supper Matthew 26:17;26-30
10. Angel (leader) promised for conquest (23:20-33)

D. Renewal of the covenant (24:1-11)

E. The Tabernacle (24:12-27:21)

1. Revelation given on Mount Sinai (24:12-18)
2. Offering for the Tabernacle (25:1-7)
3. Revelation of the Tabernacle (25:8-27:21)

F. The Priests (28:1-29:46)

1. Priestly dress (28:1-43)
2. Consecration of the Priests (29:1-37)
3. Offerings of the Priests (29:38-46)

G. Instructions (30:1-31:18)

8. Instructions of use of the Tabernacle (30:1-38)
9. Instructions for building the Tabernacle (31:1-11)
10. Tables of stone (31:18)

**IV. Israel's Fall and Restoration (32:1-40:38)**

- A. The golden calf (32:1-6)
- B. Moses intercedes for the people (32:7-33:23)
- C. Restoration of covenant (34:1-35)
- D. Israel obeys the covenant (35:1-40:33)
  1. The Sabbath (35:1-3)
  2. Offering for Tabernacle (35:4-19)

3. Skilled workers appointed to do the work (35:20-35)
4. Offering given to the skilled workers (36:1-7)
5. Tabernacle constructed (36:8-38)
6. Ark, mercy seat, table and vessels, candlesticks, altar of incense, anointing oil and sweet incense (37:1-29)
7. Altar of burnt offerings; brazen laver; the court (38:1-20)
8. The sum of the people's offerings (38:21-31)
9. Cloths of service, holy garments, breastplate, coats and mitre, all approved by Moses (39:1-43)
- E. God accepts it all and fills the Tabernacle with his glory (40:1-38)

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What has this text to say about what it means to be a part of the Church, of the body of Christ?"

The Moses narrative begins on this Sunday and stretches out for the next ten weeks.

Exodus: God brought them to Egypt to save their lives. The new Pharaoh is trying to reverse God's action and kill the Hebrews off. How can God step into the middle of this and turn it around? Is it even possible? Of course, nothing is impossible for God!

This is a threat to undo God's creation.

(1) The king is the first to recognize the children of Israel as a "people," giving them a status like his own people just mentioned.

(2) In echoing the narrator's words of verse 7 (cf. Gen. 18:18), and exaggerating the numbers, an "outsider" highlights the fulfillment of God's promises. His acts of oppression confirm that God's word to Abraham in Gen. 15:13 was on target.

(3) His concern to act shrewdly will be shown to be folly; even with his wisest counselors (cf. 7:11) his policies will again and again be turned to Israel's advantage. Pharaoh's efforts will lead to an end precisely the opposite of his intentions.

(4) Storage cities built out of a concern for life (Gen. 41:34-36) are here used as a vehicle for death.

(5) Strikingly, he speaks of the exodus, echoing Joseph himself (Gen. 50:24). The phrase "escape ('alah) from the land" is exactly the wording used in 13:18, which also uses battle language. This verb is also used for God's saving action in 3:8, 17 ("bring up"; cf. Gen. 46:4). Pharaoh says more than he knows!

The Hebrews, who have just been identified as a people, are in the process of losing their identity. They are slaves of another, not a people in their own right.

The promise of God to Abraham and the safety of the Chosen People continue. God is with them every step of the way, during good times and bad times. This is not a good time for a Jewish baby to be born, yet Moses is born, is saved, and becomes one of the heroes of all time for the Jewish people.

- Egyptians fear the growing power of the Jews who are living in Egypt
  - Jews are thriving
  - Egyptians enslave the Jews and order that all boy babies be killed at birth.
  - Midwives don't carry out the orders. Boy babies live.
  - Pharaoh orders that all baby boys be killed.
  - Moses is born to a Levite, priestly family.
  - He is not killed.
  - Mother keeps him three months hidden
  - When she can't hide him any more, takes him to river and puts him in a basket.
  - Found by Pharaoh's daughter who wants to save him.
  - Through some trickery (what's new) Moses is given back to his natural mother to raise
  - When he is grown (how old??) he is returned to Pharaoh's daughter who raises him as her son, living in the king's palace.

Psalm: God is with us, saving and protecting us.

Matthew: Jesus wonders out loud who people think he is.

- Disciples say John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.
- Jesus asks who do they say he is.
- Peter, after a long pause, "YOU ARE THE MESSIAH!"

- Jesus then tells Peter that he is the rock on which he will build his church, and that the Devil will not overcome the church.
- Jesus gives Peter considerable power. Same power he gives all the disciples a bit later.
- Jesus tells disciples not to reveal his true identity to anyone.

Romans: Paul gives some rules for living:

- Offer their bodies as a living sacrifice to God
- Worship
- Be transformed from “worldly living” to Godly living
- Judge themselves fairly. Don’t think too highly of themselves.
- Remember that we are all part of the body of Christ. Each one has a role, and all the roles are not the same.
- Everyone has different gifts, that they should use those gifts in serving God
- Gifts like
  - Preaching
  - Serving
  - Teaching
  - Encouraging
  - Contributing and helping others
  - Leading
  - Showing mercy
- Use these gifts cheerfully!