

## Sermon 4, The River Nativity, Exodus 2:1-10

**Proposition:** Our God delights in upsetting expectations, both positively (in giving the story a happy ending for His people) and negatively, in that He uses the blind spots of the wicked to overthrow them.

- I. Levi's Daughter Has a Son, vv. 1-3
- II. Moses' Sister Watches, v. 4
- III. Pharaoh's Daughter Adopts a Son, vv. 5-10

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what lessons can we learn from the birth of Moses — the river nativity, as I like to call it? It is a ripping good yarn. It is just a delight to read. Three faithful daughters save a son who will save God's people. But what does it tell us about God? It tells us that He delights in upsetting expectations, both positively (in giving the story a happy ending for His people) and negatively, in that He uses the blind spots of the wicked to overthrow them. All of this, and not a single crocodile.

#### I. Levi's Daughter Has a Son, vv. 1-3

This whole chapter is a counterpoint to the closing words of the previous chapter. Pharaoh presumably wanted to let the daughters live because he thought they were an asset rather than a threat. But in this chapter (in which the word "daughter" appears seven times) the daughters are the real threat. Moses' small-time murdering does not present the slightest threat to the Egyptian regime. But the daughters' integrity and boldness, like that of the midwives in the previous chapter — that's a different story.

Daughters, are you full of integrity and boldness? Do you get the idea of what God values from this chapter? We have Moses' masculine impetuosity at the end. And it is very clearly contrasted with the quiet faithfulness of Miriam, Jochebed, and the princess.

The story contains not a single named character. Only at the very end is Moses named, and none of the rest are named until chs. 6 (Moses' parents) and 15 (Miriam). Moses' adoptive mother is not named at all. Why is this? Because the focus is on the identities of the characters as sons and daughters. A man from the house of Levi married a daughter of Levi. This is not what you expect to read after the announcement of genocide in the previous chapter. Who would dare to go and establish a family at this point? Yet these Levites do. Their faith is stronger than their fear.

Is yours? Do you trust God's promises enough to start a family during a genocide? God had specifically promised 400 years. If this family knew that promise, they could have known that their youngest children, in their old age, might see that deliverance. And so they went ahead with it.

They had a son, hid him, and then exposed him. Literally, of course, they kept Pharaoh's command and threw him in the river. But I agree with those commentators who see something

more like this: Jochebed knew a certain part of the river where Pharaoh's daughter was wont to come, and she knew that this woman was cut from a different cloth than the rest of Pharaoh's court. She carefully placed the ark of bulrushes right next to this bathing spot.

The journey of the basket through the open Nile, narrowly escaping the jaws of crocodiles, makes for good cinema (see DreamWorks' *The Prince of Egypt*), but it is not exactly what is described here. Jochebed clearly placed the basket among the reeds — not in the center of the current. Still, it was a tremendous act of faith to put this goodly child out for an Egyptian royal to find. Our expectation is that nothing good is going to happen to this son, based on what we read in the previous chapter.

## **II. Moses' Sister Watches, v. 4**

So we watch with bated breath, looking over Miriam's shoulder at what is going to happen.

Big sisters, do you know that your work can be valuable to God? Do you see yourself as His agent? Daughters have a special place in the plan of God. That is the emphasis of this whole chapter.

## **III. Pharaoh's Daughter Adopts a Son, vv. 5-10**

But I want to focus on the character of Pharaoh's daughter. Obviously God is directing all these things in the background. Clearly the placement of this chapter between chs. 1 & 3 tells us that God is preparing a deliverer for His people. And the saving of that deliverer came about through the work of daughters.

Pharaoh's daughter is honest. She pays wages. She has compassion, rather than wanting to kill. As a piece in memorial of his adoptive mother, Moses has written a fine portrait here. He says not one negative thing about her. Far from it. But he also does not say her name, or anything else about her. He does not say whether her position would definitely protect her from her father's wrath. (Not likely, one would have to guess; a tyrant of that stripe is hardly going to be uniformly kind to his own family . . .) But this woman had compassion; she was willing to relieve suffering and show love. She made Moses her son, naming him the Egyptian word "Son" because she claimed him as hers. She had drawn him out of the water — something God is elsewhere in the Bible described as doing for His people. And in Hebrew, the name "Moses" means "draw out" — exactly what Moses will do for the people of Israel.

What do we see about our God here? He turns the way of the wicked upside down. And He blesses the righteous. Through three daughters He brought a son to maturity, one who would redeem Israel. Similar, of course, is the New Testament emphasis on Mary over against Joseph. Ladies, never underestimate your calling. It is through daughters, some of whom (though see Miriam!) become mothers, that God saved Israel and the world.

Pharaoh let the daughters live. That was God's doing. The daughters saved Moses. That was God's doing. Our God is a savior. He cares for His people. Can you trust Him? Can you believe in Him? He uses the blind spots of the wicked to overthrow them. He loves to counter our expectations.

God countered expectations at creation. He did it again at the flood. He did it when Mary birthed Jesus in a cow's stall. And He does it today with the growth and prosperity of the church

— in rich countries, like ours; in poor countries, like India; in countries near the homeland of Jesus and countries on the other side of the planet from there; in all these places, the character of God is the same. He delights to deliver His people. And He delights to save not by bow, by spear, by warriors — but by women, by poverty, by obscurity. Three nameless daughters saved Moses and thus Israel and thus Christ and thus you and me. Can you trust the God they served? Amen.