

**A Story of Life**  
*Exodus 1:8-2:10*  
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<sup>8</sup> Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup> He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. <sup>10</sup> Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." <sup>11</sup> Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. <sup>12</sup> But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. <sup>13</sup> The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, <sup>14</sup> and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

<sup>15</sup> The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, <sup>16</sup> "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." <sup>17</sup> But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. <sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. <sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. <sup>22</sup> Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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?" <sup>8</sup> Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

A long, long time ago,  
 In a land far, far away,  
 There was a young mother who had a son.  
 She and her husband and her toddler lived far away from their home.  
 One night, in the very dead of night,  
 They had fled from an evil empire that had set out to kill the toddler and every child like him.  
 They made it safely to a land they had never been to before,  
 But had heard so many stories of—  
 Stories of life—  
 Filled with plenty and hospitality and welcome  
 And stories of death—  
 Filled with fear and oppression and slavery.

The husband worked tirelessly by day as a handyman,  
 Fixing broken tables, repairing holes in roofs, replacing spokes on the wheels of carts,  
 Doing all he could to provide for his small family.  
 And the mother worked just as tirelessly at home,  
 Cooking, cleaning, sewing small goods for market,  
 And caring for her son.  
 All of this they did away from their homeland  
 And the community that was supposed to help them.

They had the tiniest of houses,  
 But it was overflowing with great love.  
 Unfortunately though, their love didn't make the days any shorter,  
 Or the work any easier.  
 And it didn't get the toddler to sleep through the night yet either...

One evening,  
 At the end of a very long and very ordinary day in their "new normal,"  
 The mother took her young son in her arms,  
 And she hugged him tight  
 As she quietly offered a prayer of thanksgiving for their safety,  
 And a petition for enough courage to face the next day.  
 And another petition for just a little bit more sleep than the night before.  
 Then she laid him down and tucked him in.  
 As she stroked his curly hair away from his smooth, dark skin,  
 She told him this story:

A long, long time ago,  
 In the exact same place we are right now,  
 There was a king.  
 This king was kind to our people  
 And a friend to our ancestor Joseph.  
 When we had no food left in our homeland,  
 This king gave us the very best of the land to live on.

We were fruitful and we multiplied,  
Even though we were far from our home.

But this kind, generous king died.  
And a new king took his place.  
The new king didn't know Joseph,  
And he was afraid of our people, the Hebrews.  
He was afraid of the outsiders—  
Terrified that the immigrants who had come to this new land in search of food and security  
Were becoming too numerous.  
They looked different.  
They spoke a different language.  
They had a different God.  
And they scared the new king.  
He thought that they would take over his kingdom  
And strip him of his power.

Because of his fear,  
The new king made the Hebrews his slaves.  
He forced them to build up cities for him,  
To be the brick layers of his empire,  
And to do every kind of field labor.  
--And to make sure that they did their jobs,  
The new king set taskmasters over them—  
Ruthless men who had no respect for human dignity or even life itself.  
They were fond of whips and chains,  
And they beat Hebrew workers within an inch of their life just because they could.

But none of this eased the king's fears.  
Enslaving the Hebrews wasn't enough.  
So he came up with a plan to erase them and their memory from his land.

The good days of the past had become nothing but memories.  
And eventually, those memories began to fade,  
Even for the Hebrews.

But there were two women who remembered the stories of old.  
One was named Shiphrah,  
And her daughter was named Puah.  
They were both midwives,  
And they came from a long line of midwives—  
Shiphrah's mother, and her mother, and her mother, and so on.  
And Puah, of course, would pass on the family trade to her own daughter someday.

They were in the business of escorting new life into the world.  
 People said that they had the magic touch—  
 That nobody understood the miracle of birth better,  
 That nobody could soothe a crying newborn faster,  
 And that nobody cared for baby and mother better  
 in the midst of stress, chaos, and danger.  
 But there was nothing *magic* about them;  
 They were blessed.  
 God had gifted them with such a strong sense of life,  
 Which they shared with every mother and child they cared for.

Unlike the king, Shiphrah and Puah feared God.  
 They remembered the stories.  
 How God had cared for Joseph in his time of need,  
 How God then cared for all of Joseph's family,  
 And how the old king showed their people kindness.  
 They knew that things used to be different.

They held these stories of life close to their hearts,  
 And they dreamed of when life would return for their people.  
 They knew that their God was the God of life,  
 And that God would never leave them nor forsake them.  
 God was the source of all their work and all their hope.

One day, the new king summoned Shiphrah and Puah to his court.  
 He had heard of their skill,  
 And that they were the most trusted midwives among the Hebrews.  
 So he ordered them to be part of his deadly plan.  
 He told them that from now on,  
 If they delivered a Hebrew boy, they were to kill the baby immediately.  
 The girls, they could let live.  
 At the same time,  
 the king threatened Shiphrah and Puah about what would happen if they disobeyed—  
 beatings and imprisonment for them and their family—  
 and he made extravagant promises of what he could give them if they followed his commands—  
 money and the finest clothes and positions of power.

The king was certain that the midwives would obey him.  
 He had instilled fear into them.  
 Nobody would ever dare to disobey him,  
 Especially not two lowly Hebrew women.  
 But as kings tend to do,  
 He greatly underestimated women,  
 Especially these women.

When Shiphrah and Puah left the king's court,  
They went right back to doing what they had always done—  
Bringing life into the world.  
Yes, they were scared of the king's threats.  
They knew that those threats were anything but hollow.  
But they served the God of life, not some petulant, insecure king.

Eventually, the king summoned Shiphrah and Puah back to his court.  
They knew this would happen.  
There were too many baby boys being born,  
And being that committed to life never goes unnoticed,  
Or unpunished.  
They had gotten themselves into good trouble, necessary trouble.

But they were prepared, and they had a plan.  
You see, the king wasn't nearly as quick-witted,  
So when he asked them why there were so many baby boys still,  
They played into all of his fears.  
“Well,” they said, “The Hebrew women are different.  
They're not like other women.  
They have vigor and life flowing through them,  
And they give birth before we can arrive.  
There is simply nothing we can do to stop them.”

And it was true that the Hebrew women were different.  
They were full of life.  
They served the God of life.  
And no plans of the king could stop the life that flowed through them.  
And the king should be very scared of the life that they were bringing into the world.  
Never underestimate the power of women who are committed to life,  
Or the God who breathes life into all creation.  
They are quite a team.

Well, the king believed the midwives  
Because he was already so committed to the idea that the Hebrews were different.  
His fears continued to grow.  
The life around him threatened his kingdom of death.  
And it was unstoppable.  
So he issued more orders,  
This time to the whole kingdom:  
Any Hebrew boy shall die!  
Throw them all in the river!

But the Hebrew women would have none of it.  
Life was on the way.  
God was bringing about something new.

The Spirit was hovering over the waters again,  
Ready to draw out a baby from a river  
And split a sea into two.

Shiphrah and Puah continued to escort life into the world.  
God was kind and gracious to them,  
And God looked upon them with favor.  
One day they helped deliver a small baby boy,  
Born to a Levite couple.  
That baby boy inherited so much life and a love for God  
From his mother,  
And his sister,  
And the midwives who cared for him,  
And their mothers  
And their mothers  
And so on,  
That he couldn't help but live into that life when he grew to become a man.  
God used him to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery and oppression  
To a land of life and freedom,  
and God walked alongside him all his days.

As the mother told this story to her son,  
She lost herself in the memory of her own mother  
And her grandmother.  
She remembered when she was expecting her son,  
And she went to see her beloved cousin, who was also expecting a baby boy,  
And even her cousin's baby could sense the incredible life that was in her.  
And that baby boy leapt for joy in the womb.  
She remembered all the Shiphrahs and Puahs who helped her along the way.  
And she gave thanks for all of them.

In all of her pondering,  
She hadn't even realized that her son had fallen asleep,  
Well before the end of the story.  
But just to be safe,  
She kept stroking his hair a bit longer,  
And she sang him the same lullaby  
That she had been singing since before he was born:

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...