

## **Midwives at the Birth of Hope – Sermon on Ex 1 & 2: 1-10**

Sisters and brothers,  
let me start my sermon today with a poem. We read it in the Women's Bible Study the other week, and I must say I immediately fell in love with it.

### **Shiphrah and Puah**

**There is always the possibility  
of another way;**

**always the possibility  
of changing theology, thinking,  
conditioning,**

**always the possibility  
of taking co-operation  
seriously;**

**of sharing food,  
knowing there will be enough  
to go round.**

**There is always the possibility  
of rejecting violence - totally;  
of not buying the war game, the toy gun...;**

**always the possibility that one day  
plastic models in cornflakes packets  
will not be destroyers  
but peacemakers.**

**There is always the possibility  
of responding creatively:  
trusting vulnerability... smallness,  
gentleness... tiny signs  
of new life.**

**There is always the possibility  
of not obeying orders;  
of being midwives  
at the risky birth of hope.**

In this service today in which we baptise Noah and Esther my choice of texts expresses a strong and heartfelt desire to love each other, to work and walk together, to make a difference in this world, to give birth to – not only children – but give birth to hope and visions and dreams..., and over all: to overcome all that separates people and keeps them apart from each other: boundaries, languages, social backgrounds, political systems, denominations and religions.

We all know that we can only create a world in which our children can live together in mutual love and peace if we show them ways of overcoming natural, ethnical and spiritual barriers and trying to speak one language: the language of love. The Bible texts today invite us to reflect upon “one body and many members” and on the story about “baby Moses in the basket”... a story well

known to many of us. It is a story of women, and in the centre there is a male child who with his actions will one day change the future of a whole nation. The story is all about power and threat, about courage and determination, about wisdom and awareness, and over all about solidarity.

Since the time of Joseph, the Israelites had been living in Egypt. Valued workers at first, slaves later... a threat to a Pharaoh who feared that the foreign people could outnumber his own people and oppress the Egyptian population.

Crazy, - but once he'd got that thought in his head, there was only one way out: oppress and wipe them out as fast and as effectively as possible. All male babies were to be killed...

Two brave midwives are the first to oppose the evil plan. They saved as many babies as they could, and questioned by the Pharaoh got away with giving courageous and bright responses...

Moses' mother had managed to hide her little boy for 3 months. But then it became more and more difficult. She sought a way out and did the unthinkable: she placed her child in a basket and left child and basket in the Nile... the famous river of Egypt... the giver of fertility and water and growth to the country and the people.

To make the mother's plan work, the story needed more people to take part in it. The sister of the baby boy comes on stage, the daughter of the Pharaoh, and her servants.

The Egyptian princess – obviously a childless young woman – takes her bath in the Nile. The sister of the baby in the basket observes what is going on from afar. She is the guardian for her little brother without being noticed. The princess only notices the basket and the baby.

She sends a servant to get basket and baby. And she immediately has motherly and warm feelings towards this helpless little creature.

No thought that this could be one of the babies her father would not want to live... even though she seems to assume that it can only be a Hebrew baby. It doesn't matter to her. She wants this child; and she wants this child to live and grow.

So when a young girl approaches her with the offer of a wet nurse to take care of the baby the princess agrees to the arrangement at once.

Whether she knows that this woman who comes to breast feed her new baby could be the boy's real mother? ...we don't know...

What this leads to in the end is: that the princess of Egypt pays a Hebrew mother to feed her adopted baby. And the irony lies in the fact that the princess herself has her father's future opponent raised in his own palace...

To summarise: 6 totally different women work together to care for a child that actually is not supposed to live. They overcome the boundaries of language, religion and social status in order to save this little life.

These women have the courage to overcome obstacles, take a risk and do the unusual:

2 midwives oppose a ruthless dictator and his plans of murder.

A mother entrusts her child to the water of the Nile that can bring both: life or death.

A daughter risks staying close by and approaches the daughter of the Pharaoh. And a princess – accompanied by her maid - ignores the cruel and inhuman command of her kingly father and adopts this foreign little thing...

6 woman – one road.

6 women – one aim.

6 women – one action...

...and new life cannot only be born but grow up and live!

The text of the women in Egypt shows us what it means to act together... and how such togetherness can make all the difference.

Paul calls Christians of all times and places to unity. The image of the body with many members reminds us that we all can only truly live if we work together: each at his or her place with the individual and diverse gifts given to us.

We are encouraged to help each other, to reconcile and forgive, to welcome, accept and respect each other. We are asked to show to the world what God can do with the lives of people who have the love, the passion and the courage to embody the body of Christ in this world.

Let us follow those 6 women around the baby in the basket.

Let us live unity in the midst of diversity, live unity in spite of diversity, live unity as the only way to make the world a place in which Noah and Esther can grow up as valued children of an unconditionally loving God.

They need midwives, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, princesses and servants, if you like. They need people who are labouring, who are giving birth, who are nurturing others, who are helping those in need, who are resisting evil, who are shaping world politics... and making a difference!

May we remember to always be there for them and be there for each other... because the everlasting God calls us to be midwives at the risky birth of hope.

Let me read to you again the poem with which began our reflection...

**Shiphrah and Puah**

**There is always the possibility  
of another way;**

**always the possibility  
of changing theology, thinking,  
conditioning,**

**always the possibility  
of taking co-operation  
seriously;**

**of sharing food,**

**knowing there will be enough  
to go round.**

**There is always the possibility  
of rejecting violence - totally;  
of not buying the war game, the toy gun...;**

**always the possibility that one day  
plastic models in cornflakes packets  
will not be destroyers  
but peacemakers.**

**There is always the possibility  
of responding creatively:  
trusting vulnerability... smallness,  
gentleness... tiny signs  
of new life.**

**There is always the possibility  
of not obeying orders;  
of being midwives  
at the risky birth of hope.**

Amen.