

Cunning, Compassion, and Courage



Exodus 1:8 — 2:10 places the story of Moses' birth within the context of women who appear to be without power and voice, but whose cunning, compassion, and courage lay the foundation for Moses and the liberation of God's people. This week's texts remind us of our vital role in the unfolding promise of God.

Focus scripture: Exodus 1:8—2:10

The prejudice Joseph experienced from Egyptians who refused to share a meal with an Israelite (Genesis 43:32) has come to a full head with the open and oppressive exploitation of the Israelite people. Thanks to historical amnesia, the Egyptians no longer remember that it was Joseph who kept their empire intact with his insightful dreams and his skill at working within an imperial system. Recognizing that discrimination ultimately feeds alienation, the Egyptian rulers double down on their oppression by making the Israelites live "bitter with hard service... ruthless in all the tasks they imposed" and ultimately genocidal by seeking to kill all the newborn males.

The story is an introduction to Moses and the role he will eventually play in the liberating work of God. But the formative lessons for Moses and the seeds that ultimately undermine an imperial and patriarchal system are rooted in the cunning, compassion, and courage of the women who refuse submission to injustice. Shiprah and Puah courageously take the lead among the midwives, rejecting the genocidal orders and then cunningly arguing that Israelite women are too vigorous in their labour. These midwives of justice are in turn cunningly and courageously followed by Moses' mother and sister who keep Moses hidden until such time as he can be strategically placed among reeds on the bank of the river. As the mother and daughter hope, their act of defiance is rewarded by the Egyptian princess who is brought into their conspiracy with her embrace and adoption of the child she names Moses.

It is possible the King's daughter knows nothing about Moses' mother and sister. But it is just as likely that this daughter of com-

passion knows full well what she is doing when she asks Moses' mother to nurse the child, paying her a salary to nurse her own son. The life of Moses is spared and nurtured by the cunning, compassion, and courage of all these women. They are virtues that Moses will absorb and call upon when his time to lead arrives. Nowhere is God mentioned in this story, but there is little doubt that each of these women plays a critical role in God's unfolding justice and liberation.

Psalm 124 makes explicit what is implicit in the story of the women who resist and undermine the imperial power of the Egyptian pharaoh, God is at work in bringing justice and liberation to the people.

Romans 12:1–8 offers a firm theological foundation for resisting all systems of domination by insisting we conform only to the One in whom our true unity exists, thereby discerning the will of God "what is good and acceptable and perfect."


Matthew 16:13–20 provides the reminder that like the women who play such a critical role in bringing freedom and justice to the Israelites, we each have a vital role in the realm of God coming into being.

• • • • •

It would have been easy for the Israelite midwives to feel they were powerless in the face of injustice, for the mother and sister of Moses to accept his death as their only option, or the daughter of Pharaoh to capitulate to the discriminatory fears of her father. But each resisted conforming an unjust system, becoming, instead, cunning instruments of God's justice and compassion. What does it mean to be cunning in the service of God's justice and liberation?

Focus scripture
Exodus 1:8 — 2:10

Additional scriptures
Psalm 124
Romans 12:1–8
Matthew 16:13–20

 *Seasons of the Spirit*
is based on semi-
continuous readings of the
Revised Common Lectionary.

God of liberation and freedom, we thank you for the people we have known whose courage reminds us that your compassion is present and at work in our world. Following their lead, may we resist systems and practices of domination, conforming only to the spirit of your justice. Amen.

Lection Connection
links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 3–5

Young children have a natural bond with other young children. They immediately spot one another in a crowd or across the grocery aisles. Children with younger siblings also have an instinctive desire to care for their younger brother or sister. Even very young children will often feel protective of a new baby in the home.

This week's story of baby Moses and his big sister Miriam will likely capture their attention. The star of the story is a baby, chosen by God to be loved and cared for by three women. The story has frightening elements, but there is an underlying message

of comfort and trust that God wants us to be well and there are people who will keep us safe. Although children in this age group are moving toward some independence, they also are beginning to understand the value of family members who love them and will make sure they are safe and well.

The session will also offer various opportunities for children to practice being caring and gentle to others themselves. Pray that the children in the group are growing toward a trust in God's never-ending love for them, shown through the actions of caring people around them.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Exodus 1:8—2:10, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 69).
- ❑ Set a worship space with green cloth, candle, offering basket, Bible with bookmark placed in focus passage.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Growing Faith* (SGF) *Songbook*, *Seasons Growing Faith* (SGF) *Music CD*, and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Bring "Welcome Song" (on resource sheet ["Additional Songs and Poems,"](#) p. 82) or "Family Thank You" (p. 8 in *SGF Songbook*; #4 on *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Bring a baby doll; option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ❑ Bring story figures of Joseph, his Brothers, and Miriam (from poster [Storytelling Resources #2](#)).
- ❑ Bring resource sheet ["Baby Moses."](#)

- ❑ Bring chant "Sleep Little Baby" (on resource sheet ["Additional Songs and Poems,"](#) p. 82).
- ❑ Bring a paper child figure for each child (see ["Patterns,"](#) p. 83).

Respond

Choose from the options provided.

Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Storytelling:** copies of resource sheet ["Story Figures,"](#) construction paper; cut out a set of figures for each child.
- ❑ **Baby basket:** paper plates, green tissue paper, wooden clothespins/clothes pegs, fine-tipped marker, small pieces of light-weight fabric; cut paper plates in half and staple rims together.
- ❑ **Flowers:** round coffee filters or tissue paper circles (four per child), pipe cleaners; print, "Thank you for looking after me" on small pieces of card stock.

Bless

- ❑ Bring "Blessing Song" (on resource sheet ["Additional Songs and Poems,"](#) p. 82) or "Jump for Joy" (p. 14 in *SGF Songbook*; #10 on *SGF Music CD*).

For groups consisting mostly of three-year-olds, supplemental resources can be downloaded from the Library at www.seasonsonline.ca.



Scripture

Exodus 1:8—2:10

Cunning, Compassion, and Courage

FOCUS To discover how Moses is saved by women who trusted in God

Gather

Welcome each child, saying “Hello, (*child’s name*), we’re happy you’re here.” Invite them to share experiences from the past week.

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space. Light the candle, saying, “This candle reminds us of God’s love which is all around us.”

Pray Thank you, God,
for the stories in the Bible,
that help us learn about your love.
Thank you that we can be
with our friends here today. Amen.

Sing “Welcome Song” (p. 82) or “Family Thank You” (p. 8 in *SGF Songbook*, #4 on *SGF Music CD*).

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

❑ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hi (*names each child*). Guess what? I got to see a tiny baby this morning!

Leader: You must have enjoyed that, Priscilla.

Priscilla: Yes. I sat beside her and sang her a song. And she smiled at me! Girls and boys, have you ever helped to take care of a baby? (*Encourage responses.*)

Leader: What are some of the things that people do to take care of babies? (*Encourage responses.*) Our story from the Bible today is about a little baby who was kept safe by three special people who loved him. (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

- ❑ **Caring for babies** Invite children to take turns holding the baby doll and rocking it. Talk together about the things that we can do to help care for babies. Explain that the Bible story today is about a little baby and three special people who helped to look after him.

Engage

Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the book of Exodus.

Show the story figures of Joseph and his Brothers (from the poster *Storytelling Resources #2*) and help children remember the story of Joseph and his coat, his brothers’ jealousy, and their eventual reconciliation years later. Explain that this week we will hear a story about a different family in the Bible. Show the figure of Miriam

and invite children to listen to the story to hear what Miriam does.

The Bible story

Use the resource sheet “*Baby Moses*” and the baby doll to tell the story based on **Exodus 1:8—2:10**. Then invite them to act out the story themselves. Tape two long lines on the floor to represent a river and sit around the edges of that river. As you summarize the story, invite children to mime the actions: The baby’s mother made a basket, hugged the baby and put him in the basket, and floated the

basket in the water. The big sister Miriam hid beside the river, watched the basket carefully, talked with the princess, and went to get Moses' mother. The princess picked the baby out of the basket, listened to Miriam, and welcomed Moses' mother.

After the story

Poem Moses' mother and sister loved him very much. We can love babies too. Lead the children in the poem, "Sleep Little Baby" (p. 82), inviting them to repeat each line after you and follow your actions.

The baby's mother trusted in God and helped keep baby Moses safe. The baby's sister and the princess trusted in God and helped keep baby Moses safe. Our families love us and help keep us safe. How does a hug help us to feel safe? Give each child a paper figure. Using reusable adhesive, help them to join all the figures together into one big circle "hug."

Respond

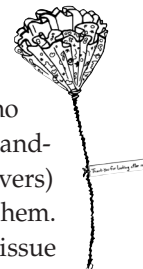
Choose from the following activities.

- ☐ **Storytelling** Visual props can help children retell this week's story. Give each child a set of figures from the resource sheet "Story Figures" and a sheet of construction paper. Invite children to colour the figures. Help them tape their strips of water along the bottom edges of the papers, leaving the top edge free so the basket can move through the water. Invite children to glue the three figures onto their papers and imagine what the three might be saying to each other. Encourage them to practice sliding the basket through the water as they retell the story. Use paper clips to attach basket to papers and encourage children to take these home and tell the story to people who care for them.
- ☐ **Baby basket** Moses' mother made a special basket to hold Moses and keep him safe. Give each child a paper plate "basket" to decorate and stuff with some tissue paper. Help each child draw a simple baby face on the head of



a clothespin/peg and then wrap it in a piece of cloth and place in the basket. Encourage children to keep their baskets where they can be reminders of God's love and care for us, as God loved and cared for baby Moses.

- ☐ **Flowers** We can trust God to love and care for us. Encourage children to think about the people who love and care for them (parents, grandparents, friends, neighbours, caregivers) and make thank you flowers for them. Distribute the coffee filters or tissue paper circles for children to decorate with markers. Then help them form these into flowers by placing one of the filters decorative side down and stacking the other filters decorative side up on top; fold in half, scrunch the bottom middle, and wrap one end of a pipe cleaner tightly around scrunched area to hold in place. Tape the card with the words, "Thank you for looking after me" to the pipe cleaner "stem."



Bless

Gather in the worship space. Light the candle again and remind children that God loves them very much.

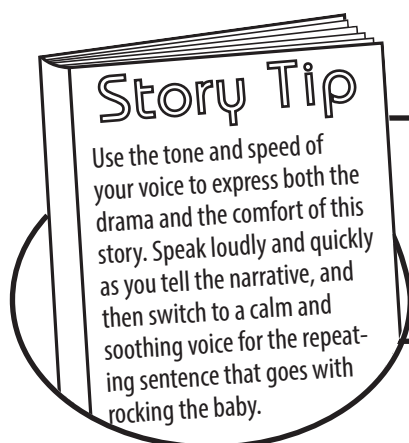
Pray Thank you, God,
for your BIG (*stretch arms wide*) love.
Thank you for always
caring for us. Amen.

Sing the "Blessing Song" (p. 82) or the song, "Jump for Joy" (p. 14 in *SGF Songbook*, #10 on *SGF Music CD*).

Send each child out with the words, "(*Child's name*), you can trust God to love and care for you."

Reflect

In what ways did the children demonstrate that they have a sense that they, like Moses, are special and loved by God? Say a prayer for each child in your group over the coming week.



Story Tip

Use the tone and speed of your voice to express both the drama and the comfort of this story. Speak loudly and quickly as you tell the narrative, and then switch to a calm and soothing voice for the repeating sentence that goes with rocking the baby.

Baby Moses

(based on Exodus 1:8—2:10)

(Have a baby doll hidden somewhere in your room. Begin the story by whispering, "Shh, can you hear a baby crying? Listen... The baby is crying again. Let's see if we can find the baby." Encourage everyone to look. When the baby is found, bring it back to the story area and begin rocking the baby. Say, "Let's pretend that this is baby Moses." Encourage everyone to pretend rocking a baby as they practice the phrase "Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.")

Long ago in Bible times, a very special baby was born. The baby's family loved and cared for each other, and they loved and cared for baby Moses, too. **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**

Moses' family took good care of him. Every day Mother fed baby Moses. She wrapped baby Moses in soft blankets. Every day Moses' sister, Miriam, played with baby Moses. She loved to tickle his toes and watch him smile. **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**

But there was a mean king who wanted to hurt baby Moses. The family was scared. What would they do? God helped Moses' mother plan a way to keep her baby safe.

God had a plan to care for Moses. **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**

Moses' mother found a basket with a cover on the top. Then she put tar on the bottom and up the sides so water could not get in. This basket would be a boat – and it would be a bed for

baby Moses. Mother wrapped the baby snug and warm. She carefully put the baby in the basket and walked down to the river. Miriam, Moses' sister, went along. **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**

Miriam watched as Mother laid the little basket in the water along the edge of the river. The basket floated on top of the water like a little boat. Miriam stayed and watched the basket as it rocked gently in the water. **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**

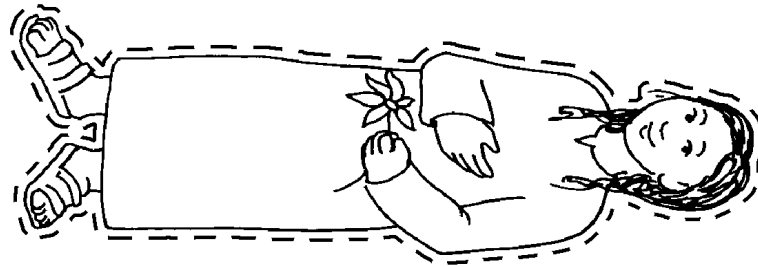
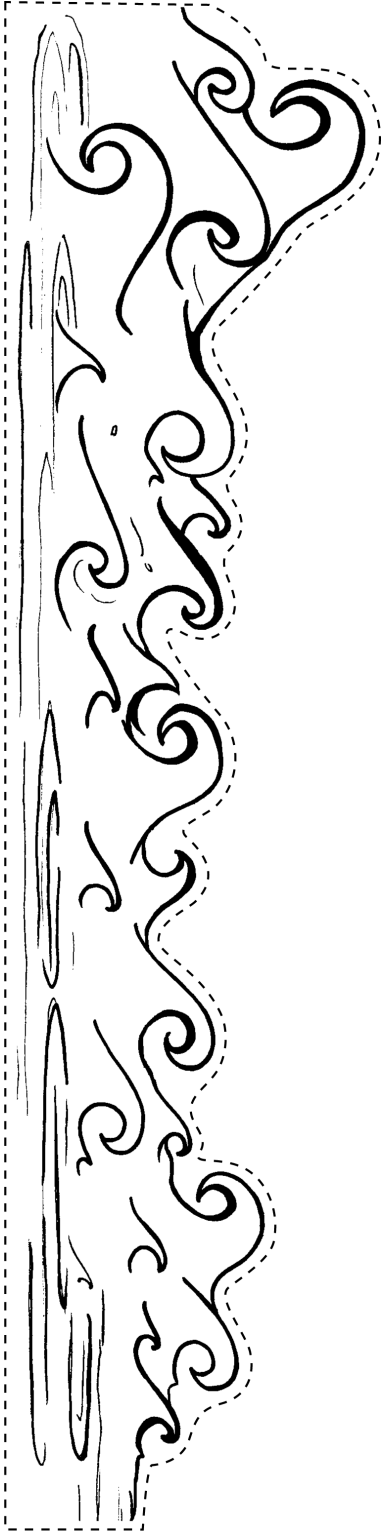
Suddenly, Miriam heard footsteps. Someone was coming. It was a princess, the king's daughter. The princess saw the little basket. The princess heard Moses cry. What would the princess do? She opened the basket, gently picked up Moses, and snuggled him. "You need someone to care for you," she said. **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**

Miriam was very brave. Miriam walked up to the princess and said, "I could get somebody to take care of this baby for you. Just until he grows big enough to come and live with you." **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**

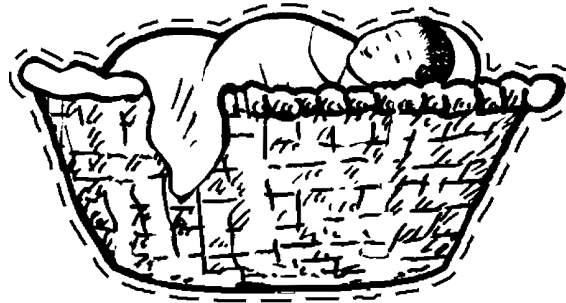
"Yes," said the princess. "That's a good idea!" So Miriam ran home. She came back with her own mother – the baby's mother. And the princess let Moses' mother take the baby home. Now baby Moses was safe. And when baby Moses grows big enough, he will go and live in the palace with the princess. But for now... **Go to sleep, baby Moses. You are loved.**



Story Figures



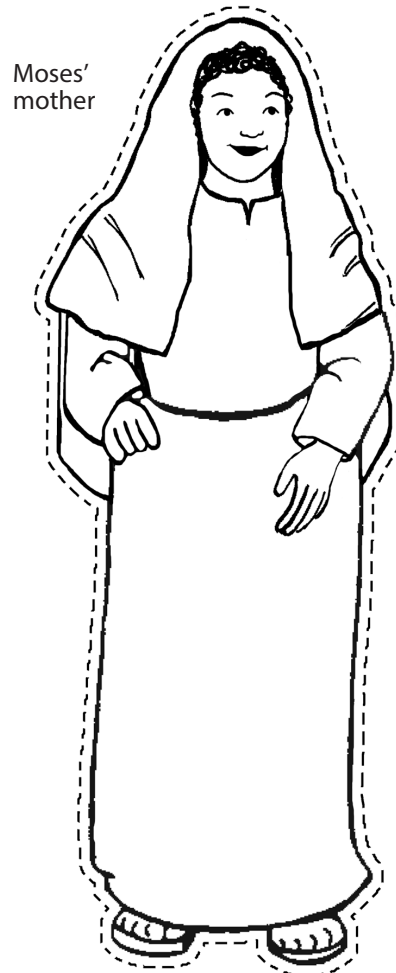
Miriam



Baby Moses



Egyptian princess



Moses' mother

ADDITIONAL SONGS AND POEMS

WELCOME SONG

(tune: "London Bridge")

Gather round with us today,
to sing and pray, to learn and play.
Gather round with us today,
God loves us in every way.

BLESSING SONG

(tune: "London Bridge")

God is with us as we go,
as we go, home today.
God is with us as we go.
God loves us in every way.

GOD'S LOVE

(tune: "The Wheels on the Bus")

God's love for me goes on and on,
on and on, on and on.
God's love for me goes on and on,
everywhere I go.
(Repeat song using the words "you" and
"us" instead of "me.")

I CAN SING AND PRAY

(tune: "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star")

I can sing and pray and grow.
I can draw and laugh and throw.
I can push and pull and lift.
I can choose to share my gifts.
I can sing and pray and grow,
all because God loves me so.

I'M LOVED

(tune: "Head and Shoulders")

Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
knees and toes, knees and toes.
Head and shoulders, knees and toes,
all of me is loved!
(Other verses: Wiggly fingers, wiggly
toes... Eyes and ears, and mouth and
nose... Neck and elbows, hips and
feet...)

LISTEN, LISTEN

(tune: "London Bridge")

Listen, listen, God loves us,
God loves us, God loves us.
Listen, listen, God loves us,
God helps us to be friends.

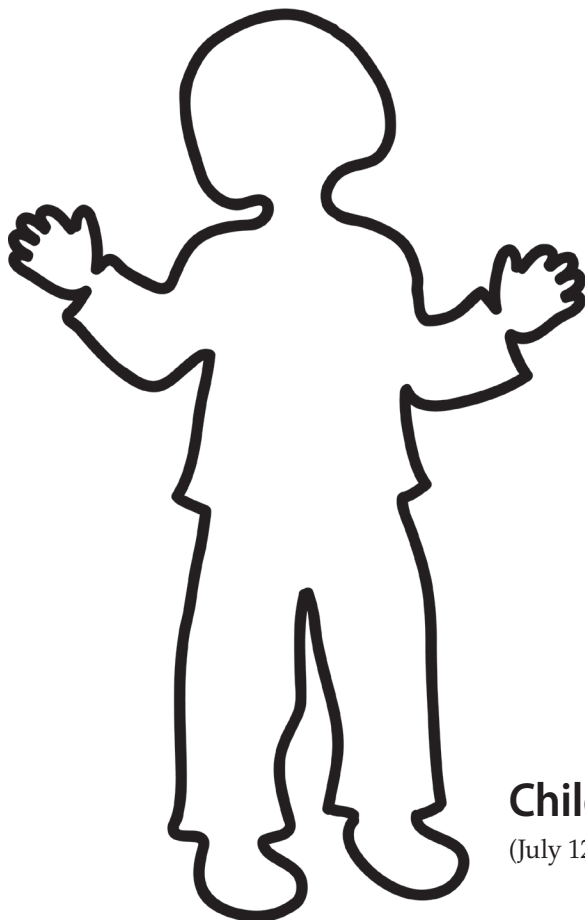
SLEEP LITTLE BABY

(August 23)

Sleep little baby (close eyes and lay
head on folded hands),
safe in my arms (hug arms around
self).
I'll hug and rock you (cradle arms and
rock back and forth),
and keep you from harm (pretend to
hug a baby).
Hush little baby (put finger to mouth
and say "Shhh"),
don't start to cry (wave finger back
and forth and shake head),
I'll hug and rock you (cradle arms and
rock back and forth),
'cause I love you, that's why! (Fold
arms over heart.)



PATTERNS

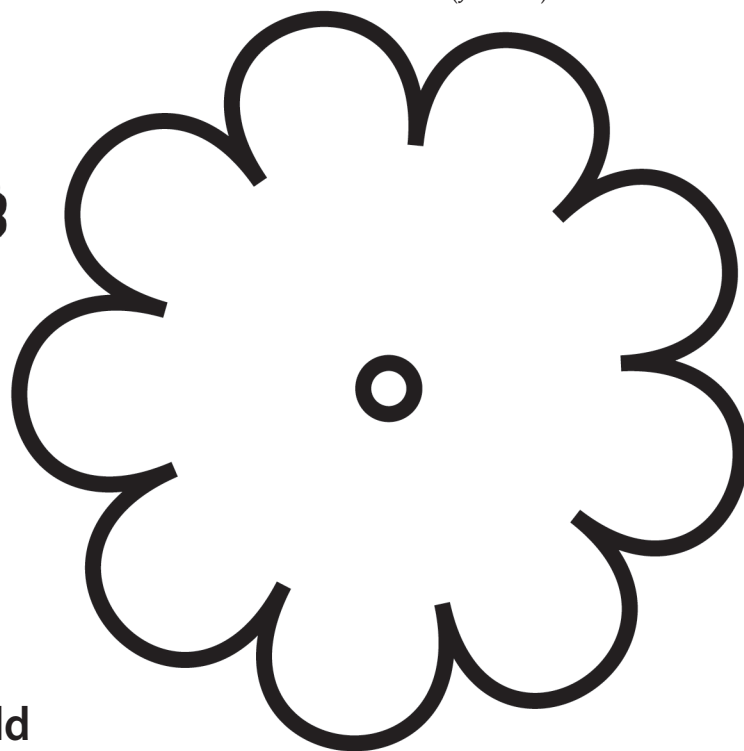


Child

(July 12, August 23, 30)

Flower

(June 28)



PAPER DOLLS

(August 16)

1. Use half a sheet of paper that has been cut lengthwise.
2. Fold paper in half and in half again in the same direction.
3. On the top section, draw a person whose hands extend to the folds of the paper (or trace pattern on this page).
4. Invite the children to do the unfolding to reveal four people.

