

August 24, 2008  
Steven Conger

(Exodus 1:8-22 NRSV) Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. {9} He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. {10} 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." {11} Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. {12} But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. {13} The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, {14} 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. {15} The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, {16} "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." {17} But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. {18} So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" {19} 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." {20} So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. {21} And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. {22} 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." {2:1} Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. {2} The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. {3} 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. {4} His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him. {5} 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. {6} 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. {7} 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?" {8} Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. {9} 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. {10} 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."

If I was to ask you this morning — “What’s in your wallet?” what would you show me?

What if I rephrased the question — How many of you have pictures of your children or grandchildren in you wallet? Anybody want to show me your pictures?

The other night Nancy and I went to the RailCats baseball game, sitting in front of us was a friend of mine, Steve Tepper and I noticed that the picture on his phone was that of his new daughter that he leaves on Tuesday to go and bring home from China.

When my children were born — the big thing was VHS tapes of them and 35mm photography — Actually, I was kind of high tech — I had an Advantik’s camera. I don’t think they even make those anymore!

Back in the day, baby books were a favorite means of logging all the “firsts” that a child goes through —  
     first day home,  
     first favorite toy,  
     first book,  
     first time the child says something that can be misconstrued as “dad,”  
 you know what I mean.

Today, you take pictures or DVDs on a digital camera, upload them to an Internet server, or Facebook, or Myspace, or YouTube. No books.

Now you have a virtual digital diary of everything baby did — the good, the bad and the ugly — from day one.

But photos are not the only way to fawn over baby.

Some parents keep a lock of hair or the baby’s hospital wristband as a memento.

But, like everything else, things have become even bigger and better.

Now, along with pictures of baby’s first squinty-eyed days of life, you can also have a cast made of baby’s footprint. You mix a pre-made, nontoxic and nonstick dough, stick baby’s foot in it, then let it dry for 24-26 hours after which you can frame it and hang it on the wall for visitors to marvel at (making sure, to remove baby’s foot first, of course).

While it's certainly great to gather up all those memories in a book or in a footprint sculpture, we also know that it's the *stories* that moms and dads tell that really leave a lasting impression on kids when they're old enough to hear about their births.

Maybe it's that story about my driving like a crazy person, passing school busses to get to the hospital the day Lindsey was born.

Or the dog that was visiting the hospital with a little hat the day Haley was born.

Children want to hear those stories when they get older because in some ways it's those stories that shape their future while their parents recall the past.

A child who hears such stories knows that they are valued and loved.

Knowing where we came from in many ways helps us know where we are going.

Can you imagine the kind of stories that Moses' mom would have told him when he was old enough to hear them and find out the details surrounding his birth.

The circumstances of his birth were, in a very real sense, a foreshadowing of what was to come.

It's in this story that we learn that this child, who would grow up to defy a world power and lead a ragtag group of slaves to freedom, comes by his rebellious streak honestly.

We might imagine that the first post in Moses' online baby book might have been a news article from the *Cairo Chronicle* about Pharaoh's order to the midwives to kill off all the male children born to the Hebrew slaves.

Pharaoh is so paranoid, that he's willing to guarantee the end of his cheap labor force in order to preserve his hold on power.

Two of the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, realize that Pharaoh is a few bricks shy of a pyramid and defy the order, blaming their failure to do the dastardly deed on the "vigorous" constitution of the Hebrew women, who give birth before the midwives can get there.

Moses' birth is thus made possible because some women who don't even know him decide to honor God instead of human power and paranoia (1:15-21). Moses would learn to do the same.

Next in the log might be a few hieroglyphics of mom Jochebed, dad Amram and sister Miriam with the baby — etchings that look like they'd been hammered out at night or when no one else was around.

For three months, they kept the baby under wraps — maybe snapping a couple of early-morning pics at the Sphinx or those obligatory naked baby pictures of the little guy bathing in the Nile in the fading evening light.

Jochebed recognized that the boy was “a fine baby” which, on the surface, appears to be the kind of thing any mother would say. Look carefully at the Hebrew, though, and you see that the word *ki tov* is used to describe the baby — the same word that God uses to describe creation as “good” in Genesis 1.

Josephus, writing centuries later, tells of a story from the midrash where Amram was told by God in a dream that the baby was going to be Israel's liberator (Antiquities II, 212, 215-216). His parents saw that something special was happening with this boy. At some point, though, they could no longer keep the growing boy a secret, leaving Jochebed to hatch a desperate and dangerous plan to preserve the boy's life.

Click on the next link of the memory log and you might see a piece of papyrus as a reminder of the basket that Moses was put in and set adrift down the Nile. Interestingly, the same Hebrew word for this “basket” is used for “ark” in the story of Noah in Genesis (2:3; Genesis 6:14).

Once again, the writer seems to be telling us, God is saving his people from the watery chaos of human corruption and taking them forward to a new life. You have to imagine Jochebed tearing up in the telling of this part of the story — all the fear and desperation coming to a head there at the river-bank.

Maybe Miriam would make an entry as a proud big sister, the one who followed the basket/ark down the river and saw Pharaoh's daughter coming down to the water for her bath, finding the basket and the baby.

Remember that her paranoid father had ordered all the Egyptians to throw the Hebrew baby boys into the river when they found them (1:22).

Even though she recognized the baby as a Hebrew, she decided to raise him as her own — once again setting the pattern of defying authority that would

mark the baby's life.

Miriam sees this and thinks quickly herself, offering to go get a wet nurse for the baby who is the boy's own mother. Jochebed gets her boy back for a time, but only until he was old enough to live with his adoptive mother in Pharaoh's court (2:10).

Cecil B. DeMille and *The Ten Commandments* notwithstanding, we don't know if Moses ever talked to his birth mother again after he was taken to live in Pharaoh's palace. Tradition holds, though, that even as a child, Moses carried some of her pluck. Another Midrash says that the child Moses was once sitting on Pharaoh's lap and took the crown off the despot's head and put it on his own. Paranoid Pharaoh decided to test the boy's loyalty by putting the crown and a bowl of hot coals in front of the boy. If he chose the crown again, he would be killed. The story goes that an angel guided Moses' hand to the coals and, taking one, he touched his lips with it, which resulted in his famous speech impediment.

The bottom line for the writer of Exodus was that here was a child who, from the get-go, was destined and prepared to leave his mark all over the place:

in the palace,  
in the gardens of Goshen,  
in the wilderness and among the people of God.

His baby footprint would grow ever larger, eventually leading a whole nation through the trials and tribulations of desert wandering on its way to promised freedom. He would usurp the authority of a world power, lead his people for 40 years and hold them together by the force of his God-connected character.

He would replace the ruthless and arbitrary rantings of despots with a code of law that we still use today. All this because his family refused to accept the fate that the world had laid out for him and, instead, placed him in the hands of God.

And I think that is the message for all of us — that we can and do influence the many people around us — Children — Grand-Children — Neighbors — and many others.

So what's in your wallet?

What stories do you have to tell, as we have influenced others to grow up in God.