

MOTHER MOSES

by Erin Wathen



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Mothering Moses

A monologue program for women's ministry

by Erin Wathen

CAST

(In order of appearance)

SHIPHRAH — Midwife at Moses' birth

JOCHEBED — Moses' mother

MIRIAM — Moses' sister

PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER

NARRATOR

PRODUCTION NOTES

Mothering Moses was originally performed for a mainline Protestant worship service, though it could be appropriate for a Jewish audience as well. It is the story of four women who played a role in saving the life of Moses, who would later lead Israel out of slavery. With its all-female cast, it would be an excellent choice for a women's ministry event, such as a conference or banquet.

This piece requires almost no rehearsal. It is comprised of four monologues. As presented here, the monologues are performed consecutively in a program, but they may also be performed separately throughout a series of sermons or lessons if you prefer. While the focus is on the Exodus story, it could easily be used alongside other parts of Scripture or independently. God performs great works through everyday acts of faith, and this short piece explores that truth in the life of these four biblical women.

The run time is about five minutes per monologue, or twenty to twenty-five minutes as a total program. Also included is an optional litany relating to the script. We took a black box approach to costuming, where each woman wore only gray and/or black clothing. Period costumes would also be suitable if preferred. Regardless of how your characters dress, it can be very effective for each woman to "pass the veil" (a length of cloth or an oblong scarf as in a biblical headpiece) to the next speaker. The only prop needed is a large basket that should be placed On-stage prior to the performance.

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Scripture cited in the Litany on pages 10-11 is Linda Siegwald's paraphrase based on her study of several translations.

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1 (*SHIPHRAH enters wearing a veil and stands at a*
 2 *microphone at Center Stage. All the other characters should*
 3 *stand here as well when it is their turn to speak.*)

4 **SHIPHRAH:** I remember my shaking hands and pounding
 5 heart like it was yesterday. A regular Hebrew midwife
 6 like me, standing before the King? Unbelievable. My
 7 friend Puah — she’s a midwife too — was with me. It
 8 is unheard of that Israelite women be called before the
 9 King, so we knew it would not be good news.

10 We knew that Pharaoh was not a nice guy. Turns out
 11 he’s not very bright, either. Here he’s got the most
 12 powerful slave force in history, and he decides there
 13 are too many of us. We might get “ideas,” he says, or
 14 get big enough to overthrow him. So he decides to kill
 15 the boy babies.

16 But when the backbreaking labor and crippling
 17 oppression didn’t work as a means of birth control,
 18 Pharaoh summoned Puah and me and told us his new
 19 plan. His decree was that anytime a woman gives birth
 20 to a boy, we should kill it. In a brilliant stroke of
 21 mercy, he decided to let the girl babies live. Apparently
 22 the female population isn’t worth worrying about.
 23 Amazing how many of the babies born around here
 24 lately have been “girls.”

25 But we knew not all the women would think to
 26 disguise their sons, and we also knew that disguise was
 27 only a temporary fix. We had to think of some other
 28 way to save our boys — the sons of God. Now, don’t get
 29 me wrong — I’m afraid of that crazy, wicked old tyrant.
 30 But I have even more fear of the God of Abraham, the
 31 God of Jacob. Even though he doesn’t rule us so
 32 harshly, he’s capable of bringing down a wrath that
 33 Pharaoh has never imagined. So the question of who
 34 we would serve was really no question at all.

35 We laughed all the way home that the King, thinking

1 women so worthless, had given us such power. The
2 future of our people, and his, were in our hands now.
3 And if he knew so little about women ... well, we
4 wondered, how much could he really know about the
5 birthing of babies?

6 We figured the whole business of giving birth was
7 beyond him, as it was most men, to be fair. So when he
8 noticed that Hebrew boys were still cropping up
9 everywhere, we just told him that our women were in
10 such great shape — all that backbreaking labor, you
11 know — well, they were just practically having babies
12 in their sleep. No pain, no suffering, no time or need to
13 call for a midwife. Why, these babies were slipping
14 quietly, peacefully into the world unaided, and we
15 didn't even know about them!

16 Needless to say, the old man was not happy. I don't
17 know if he bought it or not, but he didn't kill
18 us — which we were prepared for, by the way. He just
19 told his people to throw all the Hebrew boys into the
20 Nile. I like to think that even though the Egyptians
21 must serve their master, they will first serve their
22 gods — some of whom, surely, would frown on the
23 slaughter of innocents, just as our God does.

24 And meanwhile ... well, meanwhile, God has other
25 ways to keep this nation alive. Seems like our women
26 are giving birth at alarming rates lately — resident
27 midwives included. What an awesome reminder that
28 there is a plan, a purpose at work here, so much
29 greater than a tyrant's ego. It's a scary time to give
30 birth, though; I pray for a daughter myself. For the first
31 time in our history, even the men are praying for
32 daughters. But God gave us the wisdom and courage to
33 survive this far. God has been with us in this
34 wilderness and, we must believe, will go with us into
35 the next one. (*SHIPHRAH removes the veil from her head*)

1 *and hands it to JOCHEBED, who positions it on her head*
 2 *when she enters. SHIPHRAH then exits.)*

3 **JOCHEBED:** When you have five mothers and forty-two
 4 brothers and sisters, you don't get many gifts. If your
 5 people happen to be the slave of an evil king, you can
 6 count on even less. But once that I can recall, there was
 7 a gift. One extraordinary gift that, even though I
 8 cherished it at the time, would change my life — all our
 9 lives — in ways I couldn't imagine.

10 I was old when I got married — eighteen. That was
 11 unusual, but it was becoming more and more common.
 12 My people were so immersed in this strange world
 13 ruled by this strange man, and our lives were so full of
 14 his laws and labor that we were beginning to lose sense
 15 of ourselves. We had little time to be together as
 16 families, and no time — or place — for worship. We still
 17 believed in the God of Abraham, but we hadn't heard
 18 his voice in a very long time. Some of our most sacred
 19 traditions, like marrying and having children, were
 20 falling by the wayside. Who had time for children when
 21 sunup to sundown was spoken for? We were strangers
 22 in a strange land, and it was growing difficult to
 23 remember who we were and where we had come from.

24 But I did marry, finally. I married a Levite cousin,
 25 just as my sisters had done. On the morning when I
 26 would leave my family, my mothers gave me the gift I
 27 cherished. (*Picks up basket.*) It was a basket of
 28 beautifully woven papyrus that each of them had
 29 shared a hand in crafting. I was overwhelmed. When
 30 could they have possibly found time to make something
 31 so beautiful when our days were so full of heavy labor?
 32 I brought my prized basket with me to my husband's
 33 house, wondering what I would ever own that might be
 34 precious enough to carry in this basket.

35 Like so much of our lives, it became a part of my

1 everyday work. It carried linens and bread, rocks and
2 earth, and other things that marked a life of heavy
3 lifting. I had children and even carried them in it until
4 they were too big.

5 I wasn't the only one having children. It seemed that,
6 in spite of how much we were losing touch with our
7 past, we just kept having children. You would have
8 thought the King would be pleased — more hands to
9 labor for him, after all — but it turns out all those
10 children made him nervous, so he told our midwives to
11 kill all the boys that were born alive. When that didn't
12 work, I began to have some hope that our community
13 hadn't totally fallen apart after all. Here were two
14 women still fearing God more than king. It seemed that
15 some of us, at least, still remembered who we were and
16 who we really served.

17 I just hoped I wouldn't bear any more children after
18 that. Pharaoh got scared enough to actually order these
19 children thrown into the Nile. Who knew if his people
20 would obey or not? But it was not a chance any mother
21 would want to take. When it looked like God was giving
22 us another child after all, I spent many long months
23 looking at my basket, now worn and torn from years of
24 serving its purpose. It reminded me of a long-ago time
25 I had only heard about when our people lived and
26 worked and worshiped together. It reminded me of the
27 stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It reminded
28 me that I was part of something more than the
29 darkness of this present time.

30 Now my son has grown too big for me to safely hide
31 him, and the basket speaks to me again. God gave us
32 the wisdom and the courage to survive this far. God
33 has been with us in this wilderness and, I have to
34 believe, will go with my son into the next one, however
35 he may arrive there. The King said to throw the

1 children in the Nile. Little does he know this child
 2 doesn't go anywhere alone. None of Israel's children go
 3 alone. (*JOCHEBED removes the veil from her head and*
 4 *hands it to MIRIAM upon her entrance, then exits. MIRIAM*
 5 *places the veil on her head.*)

6 MIRIAM: I am alive. That's no small feat these days. When
 7 I was born, the King was determined to stop new life
 8 from coming to my people. It was not grace that made
 9 him spare the girls, but ignorance. In a way, I guess I
 10 can thank the limited vision of a tyrant for my life. I
 11 don't have to hide or disguise myself. I am of no
 12 consequence. I am alive, but I am no one.

13 When my brother was born, we feared he would not
 14 be so lucky. Thanks to the wise midwives and the
 15 bravery of our mothers and fathers, we were able to
 16 save many of our boys, but not all of them. Not by a
 17 long shot. Now, when sons are born to our families, we
 18 no longer sing and dance in celebration. We are silent.
 19 Our houses are dark. A cloud of fear hangs over us, so
 20 dark and so real it's a wonder Pharaoh himself can't
 21 see it from the palace.

22 Under this cloud, into this silence, came my brother.
 23 He was a quiet baby — so quiet that we wondered if
 24 he could even make a sound, if he would ever be able
 25 to speak. When he was three months old, he began to
 26 make some noise. Not as much as most babies, but
 27 enough that we knew we wouldn't be able to hide him
 28 much longer ...

29 One day my mother set out toward the Nile with him.
 30 He was hidden in her basket. To anyone else, she
 31 looked like all the other women going to do the linens.
 32 But I saw a woman driven by fear to do a horrible
 33 thing. It was the same fear I'd known all my life, but
 34 one I'd never seen in such harsh color before. She was
 35 going to put my brother in the water and let the wind

1 carry him where it would.

2 I ran after her. I didn't want to draw attention to
3 her, so I quietly begged her not to do it. I could hide
4 him, I said; I could dress him as my sister, I could keep
5 him quiet, I would do everything in my power to keep
6 him from this uncertain fate. I'd do anything but send
7 him down the river alone. But "Israel's children are
8 never alone," my mother said. She placed him in the
9 river and, with a glance to the left and right, she
10 quickly walked away.

11 She had such great faith. Even under this dark cloud
12 of terror, she had faith that God would guide her son
13 and protect him. But I was afraid, so I followed him,
14 sometimes running and sometimes barely moving, as he
15 floated down the river farther and farther from us, but
16 also, I realized, farther and farther from this dark place
17 into which he'd been born.

18 It was almost evening when the basket caught in
19 some reeds and stopped there. I was thinking about
20 rescuing him and making a run for it, or even just
21 pushing him on, when someone else stepped up to the
22 water. I could tell by her dress that she was an
23 Egyptian, and I silently prayed that she was merciful.
24 Pharaoh's people had been ordered to throw our boys
25 into the Nile *without* a basket, and though not all of
26 them obeyed, many certainly did.

27 I watched — first fearful, then terrified — as I
28 realized this woman was no ordinary Egyptian. This
29 was Pharaoh's own daughter!

30 I almost ran forward to beg for my brother's life, but
31 something in her face made me stop. She was looking
32 at my brother as though she knew him, as though she'd
33 been waiting for him. She turned to her maid and said,
34 "Take this child to my rooms and see if you can find a
35 wet nurse. I will raise him as my own." Before I could

1 stop myself, I boldly stepped out. I had an idea.

2 “Your highness,” I said, “If you’ll allow me, I could
3 go and get a nurse from among your slaves. Many of
4 our women, who have lost their own sons, are ready to
5 serve.” She nodded her agreement, and I ran all the
6 way home. I couldn’t wait to tell my mother that she
7 had a very important job waiting for her — the job of
8 nursing her own son.

9 As I ran back to that cloud of despair, I should have
10 felt sad. Hopeless. I should have known that I’d never
11 see my brother again. I should have known that the life
12 before me held no joy. But our baby was alive. Our God
13 had drawn him from the water by the hand of an
14 enemy. Our God, silent so long, was with us after all. If
15 God was with us in this wilderness, I had to believe
16 that our people would be drawn out into new life, just
17 as my brother had been. I had to believe that one day
18 I would dance and sing in worship of God after all.
19 *(MIRIAM removes the veil and when PHARAOH’S*
20 *DAUGHTER enters, she puts it on, turban style. MIRIAM*
21 *then exits.)*

22 **PHARAOH’S DAUGHTER:** Gods go silent. We are taught all
23 our lives to trust the gods for all that we need, to guide
24 us and make us great. But I have spent long years
25 praying to Min, the god of fertility, to send me a child.
26 I appealed to Anquet, his counterpart, but she, too, has
27 turned her back. I wonder if my father’s cruelty to our
28 slaves has put us too far from their hearing. Many of
29 my sisters are praying the same, and we all find
30 ourselves barren. Meanwhile, a whole generation of
31 Israelites has cowered under my father’s tyranny. He
32 has slaughtered their innocent children and killed
33 many more by the sheer force of labor. The Hebrew
34 people must feel that their God can be silent, too.

35 My silence was broken today, though I don’t know if

1 it was my god or theirs who broke it. I was walking
 2 with my maids and saw a basket washed up in the
 3 shallows, caught in some low reeds. When I went to see
 4 what it held, I saw a baby looking back at me. I was
 5 overjoyed, yet not a bit surprised. This, after all, was
 6 my child. I had prayed. I had waited. Someone, finally,
 7 had answered me.

8 As I drew him from the water, he let out a strange
 9 cry. It was that of a child who might someday have
 10 trouble speaking. This odd voice spoke to me, and I
 11 knew that here was a child who didn't know to be
 12 afraid. Here was a child who had survived my father.
 13 I would make sure that he was not thrown back into
 14 the water. I would make sure that he would grow to
 15 answer his own God ... that God of long silence, now
 16 speaking to us both.

17 Before today I had no way to oppose my father. I
 18 had riches and servants, but no power, no voice, no
 19 name as far as he knew. But now this unique child of
 20 Israel will survive under Pharaoh's own roof, and he
 21 can do nothing to change it. He will not oppose a child
 22 I adopt as my own.

23 Another child — an older girl this time — steps out
 24 of the reeds and offers to go and fetch me a Hebrew
 25 wet nurse. As she runs, I think how miraculous this day
 26 is. While my gods ignore my pleas for a child, the God
 27 of Israel has given me one of his own. Now he will also
 28 send me a helper. This child could still, in some small
 29 way, grow up among his people. What can he possibly
 30 be, this child who will be both Hebrew and Egyptian,
 31 both slave and royalty? Who will be his people? Who
 32 will be his God?

33 I cannot answer, but I have drawn him from the
 34 water, and his cooing voice has given me a way to
 35 speak. I pray — to whomever will listen — that he may

1 someday pull more of the silent and suffering to a place
2 of safety, as I have done for him today. I will tell him
3 this story someday, that even in this silent desert, there
4 is life ... for those who seek it. (*PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER*
5 *exits. NARRATOR enters.*)

6 **NARRATOR:** Sometimes the desert is not just part of the
7 story. Sometimes the desert *is* the story. For
8 generations, the people of God have been called to the
9 wilderness to see what is left of the spirit when all
10 comfort and certainty is stripped away. From Abraham
11 to Moses to Jesus himself, and even today, God reminds
12 people of faith that when all is dry and lifeless, the
13 soul's deepest longing remains.

14 The earth speaks. It tells us that death is never the
15 final word. It tells us that even in the darkest, most
16 barren places, the ground can be rendered holy and
17 bring forth new life. When the dry dust seems more
18 abundant than oxygen, when the cold-blooded,
19 crawling things outnumber the warmer creatures, when
20 rocks grow where trees should be, then every drop of
21 water is sacred. Then every shoot of green is a miracle.
22 Everything that breathes bears the mark of God's love
23 and grace, because it lives where nothing should live.
24 At the simplest urging from God, new life comes up
25 singing in desert terrain and in those wilderness places
26 of the heart.

27 For these four women of faith, the call of the holy
28 sprang forth like a desert stream. They showed bravery
29 in the face of a tyrant. They chose the life of an
30 innocent and risked their own. They chose joy and
31 hope in the depths of slavery, suffering, and despair.
32 They heard the voice of God over the chaos of evil, and
33 they listened. Their small acts of faith let Moses live to
34 fulfill God's purpose. He delivered a nation from
35 slavery so that they might live freely as God's chosen



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