

New Life Episcopal Church
Uniontown, Ohio



Moses in the Bulrushes, Gustave Dore

A Sermon for the 13th Sunday after Pentecost
August 23, 2026

Barbara L. Bond

[Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – The Episcopal Church](#)

Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

Baby Stories

Today in our long series of Old Testament stories, we begin the saga of Moses, and like all good hero stories, this one starts when he is a baby. In Bible writing, there are many stories of extraordinary beginnings and births, all through the Judaic ancestor stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and so is it any wonder that the Jewish saga continues with the origin of their greatest hero, Moses, from the time of his birth in dangerous circumstances, to his remarkable coming of age to lead his people out of bondage. Perhaps not surprising, but definitely fascinating!

At the end of Genesis, the four generations of ancestor stories come to a close with Joseph in a position of power in Egypt. A few centuries later, there was new leadership in Egypt with pharaohs who didn't know that Jewish background. The Jews in Egypt had been very fruitful and multiplied, with the result that the Egyptians enslaved them to do all the work – think about those big pyramids. With the Jews doing the heavy lifting in enslavement, the Egyptians could continue their major building programs. However, those fruitful Jews kept multiplying, and eventually the Egyptian pharaoh thought he should weed them out, and thus declared a slaughter of Jewish babies, to control the population. The mother of Moses was able to protect her baby boy, and with the help of his older sister Miriam, the baby was taken into the household of the pharaoh. It's a wonderful story – Moses' mother put him in a basket and sent him down the Nile River, where he landed on the shore of Pharaoh's palace, in the bullrushes. Pharaoh's daughter noticed the basket, opened it for a big surprise, and adopted the baby. Miriam watched all this happen, and she volunteered her mother (who was also Moses's mother) to be nursemaid to the baby. And thus Baby Moses survived, in the care of both the Pharaoh's family and his own biological family. This child was obviously going to be remarkable!

In our Christian stories, we also have remarkable births and scary escapes for babies. Think of John the Baptist, born to a very old mother but destined to be the prophet of the Christ. Think of Jesus himself. According to Luke, Baby Jesus was the result of a virgin birth which occurred in a lowly stable. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus' birth is also of a virgin but is a pretty quiet event – born at home in Bethlehem, but attracting the attention of Wisemen from the East, who come to see him and thereby witness the nefarious plotting of King Herod. This story is a parallel with the story of Moses and his narrow escape, and it even involves a slaughter of innocents and a trip to Egypt. In Matthew's telling, Mary and Joseph saw the slaughter of Jewish babies and decided to escape to Egypt. Herod was slaughtering babies because he was a maniacal ruler who didn't want competition – the Wisemen had told him that this baby would grow up to be king of the Jews, and Herod thought HE was king of the Jews and wanted no competition. The similarities of the two stories are inescapable.

And this is all part of Matthew's design. Our lectionary readings for this year emphasize Matthew, and Matthew wrote his narrative for Jews and he modeled the story of Jesus on the story of Moses. So it is appropriate that Moses and Jesus have similar baby stories.

Children are the hope of the future. It is appropriate that we protect, cherish and love children. Our sacred stories tell us to take care of our children and nourish them to be the leaders of tomorrow. In all eras, there are systems and persons who want to thwart God's plan of salvation, and our sacred stories remind us to beware, now as before, to protect the leaders of tomorrow. What can we do? We can tell these stories amongst ourselves and make sure that our children know the stories too. We can make efforts to improve child welfare – through political action, through efforts for children's education and medical care, to encourage respect for all humanity and be part of God's plan of salvation. Let us never take the little folk for granted..