

Ps 124; Ex 1:8-2:10; Ro 12:1-8; Mt 16:13-20

### 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Joseph fulfilled his calling to the court and the government of Egypt. He guided the whole economy through the seven years of plenty and seven years of famine predicted in Pharaoh's dream. He kept the people of Egypt and of the whole region fed with grain from massive storehouses. The Lord assured the life and future of the nation Israel by bringing them to the Land of Goshen, through Joseph's influence at the Egyptian court. Time passed and things changed.

The new Pharaoh of Egypt did not remember Joseph after he passed away. After this excellent Hebrew vizier of the nation died, Pharaoh declared the Hebrews enemies of the state. They were forced into slavery. Then, Pharaoh began the systematic elimination of the nation of Israel. He instituted a policy of destroying all the newborn males of the nation. That is a gradual form of genocide. Being: "the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group...The deliberate destruction of an entire race or nation." ([dictionary.com](http://dictionary.com)) Murdering baby boys is slower than mass extermination. Baby girls are absorbed into the conquering nation, so that the national identity fades away after a couple of generations. This is slow murder, but still murder.

There have been more genocides in the history of humanity than we would like to remember. In the 18<sup>th</sup> c, 600,000 Buddhists were slaughtered by the Manchu Qing Dynasty of China. Between 1915 and 1916 an estimated 1.5 million Armenians were destroyed in massacres or died during Turkish military deportations, forced marches and mass starvations. That was the destruction of 75% of the Armenian population. More horror in the 20<sup>th</sup> c: Cambodia, Rwanda, Darfur, Bangladesh, 1930s and 40s Germany under the Third Reich. All these are the enduring evil intention to wipe out an entire people by those in power.

How did the Hebrew people resist and overcome annihilation? There were two midwives, (v 15) – their names are Shiphrah and Puah. Shiphrah means "beautiful" in Hebrew. Puah means "something splendid." These women are two of the first brave believers to exercise civil disobedience. They listened to Pharaoh's command to kill the boys and let the girls live. Then, they simply did not obey a law that was opposed to God's will. The Bible clearly says, "But the midwives feared (or respected) God, and they did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them." (v 17) The midwives called on God's name to strengthen and inspire them to resist the unjust ruler. They gave Pharaoh an excuse when he questioned them. Verse 20 says, "God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty." (v 21) Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them." Meanwhile, Hebrew boys were still being drowned in the Nile, but some were saved. The genocide was subverted, in the name of God.

We have relived the great saga of the Book of Genesis. Now we begin the story that is the unique hallmark of God's people: The Exodus. After Joseph died, the hero Moses came on the scene. He was kept alive by the ingenuity of his mother, Jochebed and his sister, Miriam. (Cue River Lullaby) Let's pause and appreciate that God placed this little Hebrew boy in the household of Pharaoh himself. Listen, do you hear the Lord chuckling? Moses wore fine linen – ate the finest food – played in the royal gardens. How wonderfully things work out in God's hands! The name of God is powerful.

Out of the dark working of the fallen human heart comes the rise of a savior for the people of God – fear and hatred are transformed in the Name above every Name: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The two midwives have heard and believed in the Name. Moses' mother and sister also call upon this Name. The Name above every name.

In our time of history, a name is sometimes given in honor of an older loved one. I am named for my grandmothers. Sometimes the parents name a baby something meaningful – or they give the little one a name that sounds good. Compared to the importance of naming in Old Testament times, today a name is just a label. To give your name or to ask for another's name in the O.T. days was a very important act. Think of when persons in the Bible were given a new

name: Abram becomes Abraham, Sarai becomes Sarah, Jacob becomes Israel, Simon becomes Peter, Saul becomes Paul.

How much more important the names of the Creator God! In Genesis 1:1 the writer calls God Elohim – the plural of El. The name el can be found in ancient writings referring to other gods. But the Creator God emerged as the one true God.

As El-Shaddai, He is God Almighty. El-Olam means that God is the everlasting God. El-Elyon means God, the Most High. Not until our hero, Moses, encounters God face to face will he learn God's unique personal Name. More about this later.

In the first century AD, Jesus asks His disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" He gets various answers. Then Jesus asks, "But who do you say that I am?" Let's pause here, I ask you, who do you say that Jesus is?

Simon answers correctly by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And from the moment he confesses, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," (Mt 16:16) he himself receives a new name. He becomes the Rock on which Jesus will build His church. He becomes Simon Peter.

Our faith and trust in the Name of God are the most important thing. God hears those who call out to Him. God will supply power by His Name when you need it most. Amen.