



# Central Peninsula Church

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Exodus 2:1–10  
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## What It Takes To Be a Mother

### MOTHER'S DAY

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I don't know exactly why it is but it seems that when Mother's Day comes around each year I can't let it pass without preaching a sermon on it. On Father's Day I'm more likely to just let it pass without a message specifically for fathers. That doesn't make a lot of sense because, being a father myself, you would think I would have a lot more to say to fathers than mothers. But maybe the reason for that is that I think mothers are some of the most under appreciated people in the world. So on Mother's Day I usually remind everyone to be good to their mothers and appreciate them more. But today's message is not about how to be good to your mother; it's a story about a mother who had to make some hard choices for the welfare of her son. You may never be able to change the father in your child's life, but you can do some things to help your child become the person God created him or her to be. Being a mother or a father or anyone who cares for the young isn't for the faint of heart. It requires some tough decisions—decisions that are sometimes both risky and heart-wrenching. But perhaps more than anything, it requires faith.

#### I. BACKGROUND

I'd like us to consider this morning a woman who is mentioned only a few times in the Scripture. Yet, despite her low profile, she provides for us a finely drawn portrait of a mother with faith. She even made it into the Hall of Fame of faith in Hebrews 11:23. Her name, according to Numbers 26:59, was Jochebed. Jochebed was Moses' mother.

Jochebed and her husband were from the tribe of Levi, later to become the tribe of priests. She was called into motherhood in the midst of difficult times. The nation Israel had been in Egypt for almost 400 years. They grew and prospered there, but before long they became a threat to the reigning Pharaoh. Pharaoh forced them into slavery. By the sweat of their brow, cities like Pithom and Raamses were built. He hoped to break their backs, but they continued to grow and prosper. And so he turned the heat up. He commanded Hebrew midwives to murder the newborn sons of Hebrew women as they were giving birth. When he discovered that he couldn't rely on the midwives because they feared God more than him,

he tried another approach. He told his people to stay on the lookout for Hebrew babies. If they saw one they were to throw him in the Nile and watch him drown. It was during this reign of terror that Jochebed became pregnant with her third child. She didn't have to worry about her older children, Aaron and Miriam, but the child in her womb would be fair game for any patriotic Egyptian in a bad mood. As an expectant mother or father, or a soon to be grandparent, can you imagine living with such fear?

When I think of the times in which Jochebed was called to be a mother I think of mothers today. I think of mothers in parts of Africa who face the very real prospect of having their son taken from their arms to be trained as child soldiers. These are challenging days to be a mother. Here in America, though no one threatens to kill or steal our babies, there are forces at work which threaten to drown our children. They can drown in a river of violence and promiscuity pouring out of the TV set every day. They can drown in a sea of confusion as the lines between right and wrong are blurred in our society. They can drown in a competitive culture that rewards performance above character. Every conscientious parent knows how dangerous it is to grow up in our world.

But Jochebed stands out because in the midst of great danger, she did what she could to save her child, but then when she could do no more, she depended totally on the faithfulness of God. Read the first part of the story of Jochebed with me in Exodus 2.

**“Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was beautiful, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got him a wicker basket and covered it over with tar and pitch. Then she put the child into it and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to find out what would happen to him”**  
(vv. 1–4).

#### II. JOCHEBED WAS A MODEL OF FAITH

**A. Her faith was discerning:** What characterizes

the faith of Jochebed? First of all, her faith was discerning. Verse 2 says, "**she saw that he was beautiful.**" That same idea is mentioned in Acts 7:20 where Stephen says the baby was "**lovely in the sight of God.**" It seems there is a connection between what she discerned about him and what she did. She hid him because she saw that he was beautiful. Now when I read that, I laugh. Has there ever been a mother who didn't think their baby was beautiful? But the word describes more than just physical attraction; it describes a kind of nobility in character. When she looked at this baby, she discerned something of the purposes of God for him.

It's amazing how mothers know their children. A respected psychology professor did a test to see how well mothers knew their babies. She chose 46 breast-feeding mothers who had all given birth in the previous few hours or days. Each mother was blindfolded and then asked to identify which of the three sleeping babies before them was her own. They hadn't been allowed to study their babies prior to this, yet nearly 70% of the mothers chose the right baby. They said they were able to do so simply by the texture or temperature of the baby's hand.

From the earliest age, the unique characteristics and temperament of a child can be recognized. James Dobson has actually changed his views on this over the years. He's come to believe that much of a child's personality is predetermined. A strong-willed, even defiant child isn't always the product of lax parents; sometimes they're just born that way. Jochebed studied her baby and she saw something of God's unusual calling upon his life. Our baby may not grow up to be a Moses or an Abraham Lincoln, but with discernment we can see something of God's purposes for them. We can study our children, not just as babies, but as toddlers and grade-schoolers and teenagers. We can detect God-given strengths and weaknesses. In the process, we can encourage them in a direction that's consistent with who they are. This is one of the greatest challenges of parenting because it may mean that we have to give up what we thought our child should be like. You're a musician; your child may not be. You were an athlete; your child may not be. You went to Cal; your child may go to San Jose State. You married a high achiever; your child may choose someone different. We have to let go of our plans for our children and discern something of what God's plan might be.

**B. Her faith was courageous:** The second

thing I notice about her is that her faith was courageous. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says, "**By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.**" The king said all the male Hebrew babies had to be thrown into the Nile, but she and her husband disobeyed the king and instead hid him for three months. Imagine how hard it is to hide an infant. When our first child was born, we were only 24 years old and we didn't quite know what to do with her. I remember those first few months because she had a bad case of colic. We couldn't have hid her if we tried! She made too much noise!

But somehow Jochebed succeeded in hiding him. We often think of faith as passive. We just kind of let go and let God. But real faith, is an active thing. And sometimes faith calls us to do risky and courageous things. I think of mothers who have been unable to conceive, but who have seen that as an opportunity to adopt children who might otherwise have spent their lives in an orphanage. That's a courageous act of faith. I think of mothers who are married to unbelieving husbands and sometimes defy those husbands in order to expose their children to the truth of God's word. I think of mothers who stand up to their own teenager, saying no to something when all his friends' mothers say yes. I think of mothers who chose to give up a lucrative career so they can stay home with their children when everyone around them says that's crazy.

What gives a mother the faith and the courage to act in such a way is that they fear God more than they fear man; they want to please God more than they want to please their friends, their children and even their husbands. And not only that, they trust God. They trust that as they're obedient to what he's calling them to do in the face of threatening circumstances, he'll take care of them and their child.

**C. Her faith was sensible:** The third thing I notice about her faith is that it was sensible. After three months of hiding the baby, she saw that the handwriting was on the wall. She made a little wicker basket, covered it with tar and pitch to make it float and put it in the reeds on the banks of the Nile. It's interesting that the word used here for "basket" is the same used for Noah's ark. Noah's ark was covered over with tar and pitch just like this one was. Both Noah and Moses were placed in the ark, which is not a very safe environment. The occupants of an ark are totally helpless and at the mercy of the elements. It's not like they're steering a ship. And the Nile was known for crocodiles. So Moses is out there at three months old completely helpless.

But I want you to notice that Jochebed was not

careless about this; she was sensible. She didn't send him floating down the river but placed him among the reeds along the banks of the Nile. This was a place women would congregate. It's kind of like placing a baby on the steps of a hospital today. Not only that, she didn't just put him there and wave good-bye, "Have a nice life, Moses! Maybe I'll see you sometime." No, she had his older sister stand at a distance to find out what would happen to him. If Jochebed herself had stood by the reeds, watching and waiting, it would have been obvious who she was. But his young sister made a good spy. When he was discovered, his sister offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse him, and the plan fell into place. Jochebed was clever; she was sensible; she had a plan and her plan worked.

Part of being sensible is knowing how to improvise on the spot. One mother confessed, "At the beginning of my daughter's wedding ceremony, I was to light one of the candles. Not realizing the potential hazard, I got too close and set my acrylic nail on fire. Trying not to ruin my daughter's big day, I calmly lit the candle from my flaming nail and then, like a gunslinger with his six-shooter, I blew it out. Needless to say, my blackened nail was the talk of the reception."

But sometimes the common sensibility required of a mother is far more consequential. There are mothers who have chosen to give up their child to adoption simply because it was the best thing for that child. For some women that is a common sense decision that requires enormous faith and foresight and ultimately fierce love. Or I think of mothers who would love to be stay at home moms, but the family finances won't allow it. So they find ways to make it work that are best for their kids. It may be finding a way to work out of your home, or having a godly aunt or grandmother do the childcare, or even staggering work schedules with a husband so that one of you is always there.

### III. JOCHEBED'S FAITH WAS REWARDED

So Jochebed's faith was not only discerning and courageous, it was also sensible. And her sensibility paid off. Look what happens next.

**"The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the Nile, with her maidens walking alongside the Nile; and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid, and she brought it to her. When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the boy was crying. And she had pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrews' children.' Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?' Pharaoh's**

**daughter said to her, 'Go ahead.' So the girl went and called the child's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this child away and nurse him for me and I will give you your wages.' So the woman took the child and nursed him. The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. And she named him Moses, and said, 'Because I drew him out of the water'" (vv.5–10).**

The daughter of Pharaoh came to the banks with her maidens. She "saw" the basket and had it brought to her. She opened it and "saw" the child crying. She had pity on him because he was a Hebrew and could just as well be dead. Then the sister moves in just at the right time, making an offer in keeping with the custom of the time. It was standard procedure for wealthy woman to hire a wet nurse to feed a child until he was weaned, and the wet nurse would be the legal guardian during those first years. Miriam goes and finds the child's mother, who not only gets to raise the child, but now gets paid for her work!

You have to see the irony of God's hand in all of this. The mother did what she could but she couldn't have done all of this on her own. Pharaoh's chosen instrument of death, the Nile River, becomes the instrument through which Moses is saved. His mother even follows Pharaoh's orders in placing him there! A member of Pharaoh's own family comes to the river at just the right time and rescues the future deliverer—who also seems to know just when to cry. The baby is reunited with his mother who will now be able to raise the child during the most formative years and teach him about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And then Jochebed will release him to Pharaoh's daughter after he's weaned. Moses will spend his youth in Pharaoh's court, where he'll learn law, rhetoric, mathematics, hieroglyphics; he'll be trained in the art of war (Acts 7:23). One day, when Moses is leading two million people through the desert, he would put all of these disciplines to work.

God is never mentioned once in this passage, but we know he's at work. There are things mothers can do but ultimately they have to leave it in God's hands. That's the hardest thing, isn't it—letting go? A mother's love never changes, but sometimes I think parenthood is a constant process of letting go. Letting your child make mistakes. Letting your teenager learn some things the hard way. Letting your adult child follow God's call, even if it means he or she will live 1,000 miles away. Mothers, take heart! He'll use your discerning,

courageous and sensible faith to accomplish his purposes. He's working behind the scenes to accomplish his purpose in your children's lives. He WILL use you, but it's not all up to you.

One of the interesting things about this passage is how prominent a role women with motherly instincts play in the story. Jochebed "saw" that he was beautiful. Pharaoh's daughter "saw" the basket and "saw" the child crying and had pity on him. Moses' sister stands by to "find out" or "know" what would happen. All of this points to what God would soon do for his people. Later in chapter two, it's God who looks upon his people who are suffering. We're told in v.25 that "**God saw** (same word) **the sons of Israel, and God took notice** (same word-knew) **of them.**" So it's the motherly instinct of God which causes him to move forward to save his people. It's God's motherly instinct which "sees" us as worthy of delivering; which takes pity on us in our utterly helpless state. We were drowning in a sea of sin and death, but it was God's motherly instinct which compelled him to send his only Son to draw us out.

## CONCLUSION

And ultimately, mothers, that will define your purpose and call as a mother. Someone asked a full time mom, "And what is it that you do, my dear?" She responded, "I am socializing two homo sapiens into the dominant values of the Judeo-Christian tradition in order that they might be instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological utopia that God willed from the beginning of creation." Then she asked the other person, "And what do you do?"

You see, your ultimate purpose is to instill in your children a knowledge of and a faith in and a love for this God who sees and knows your child's deepest need for salvation and has decisively moved to accomplish it through the work of his Son, Jesus. He will use you; he will use your discerning, courageous and sensible faith, but it's not all up to you.