

Opening

Check-in & Introductions

Miriam Sang

The Bible Story

Please watch the story, following the link provided. If you would like to read the story as well, the text has been provided below.

Watch the Story *(Biblical adaptations written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

Together, watch the children's story time found on Manchester Children & Families Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/178276089786532/>

Old Testament Lessons

Exodus 15:19-21 (NRSV)

¹⁹When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

²⁰Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. ²¹And Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea."

Numbers 12 (NRSV)

¹ While they were at Hazereth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had indeed married a Cushite woman); ² and they said, "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it. ³ Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth. ⁴ Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." So the three of them came out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward. ⁶ And he said, "Hear my words:

When there are prophets among you,
I the LORD make myself known to them in visions;
I speak to them in dreams.

⁷ Not so with my servant Moses;
he is entrusted with all my house.

⁸ With him I speak face to face— clearly, not in riddles;
and he beholds the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" ⁹ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed.

¹⁰ When the cloud went away from over the tent, Miriam had become leprous,^[b] as white as snow. And Aaron turned towards Miriam and saw that she was leprous. ¹¹ Then Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, do not punish us^[c] for a sin that we have so foolishly committed. ¹² Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb." ¹³ And Moses cried to the LORD, "O God, please heal her." ¹⁴ But

the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp for seven days, and after that she may be brought in again." ¹⁵So Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days; and the people did not set out on the march until Miriam had been brought in again. ¹⁶After that the people set out from Hazeroth, and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

Wondering Questions (Part I)

"Wondering Questions" are open ended discussion questions. These are the same questions that our children are working through!

Wondering Questions for Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

1. I wonder what Miriam's song sounded like?
2. I wonder why Miriam was punished with the disease but Aaron was not?
3. I wonder how Moses felt when his sister was sick?

Wondering Questions for Older Children *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

4. When Aaron and Miriam both became upset with Moses, only Miriam became sick. Think of a time when you and a friend or sibling both did something wrong, but you were the one punished. How did you feel? What did you do about it? What did the other person say and do?
5. Most people don't know the stories about Miriam. They do know the stories about Moses. Why do you think that is? Why would stories about women not be included in the Bible? Why haven't we learned more of the stories about women that are in the Bible, like the stories of Miriam?
6. In this story, God had a special relationship with Moses. It was different than the relationship God had with Aaron or Miriam. How do you feel about that? Is it fair or right that God has a different relationship with one person? Think quietly for a bit about your relationship with God. You don't have to answer out loud unless you want to. Is your relationship with God a special one? Do you have a relationship with God? What's it like?

What's Going On

In the Good Shepherd children's curriculum, a section called "Teacher Helps" is provided. This section gives a deeper background to us adults. Please take turns reading through this section.

Teacher Helps *(written by Rev. Brenda Stobbe)*

The story of Miriam is scattered throughout the book of Exodus and Numbers. Some children may know the story of Baby Moses either from Bible storytelling or from the Disney movie "Prince of Egypt". But very few of us, children or adults, know the rest of the story about Miriam. Miriam is just one of a group of very strong women in the Exodus story. The Hebrew midwives who slyly avoided carrying out the Pharaoh's orders to slaughter the boy babies, the wise and desperate mother who crafted the basket, and the princess who defied who father's orders join Miriam in this saga of oppression and freedom.

Edith Deen in her book *All of the Women of the Bible*, says "Miriam is the first woman in the Bible whose interest was national and whose mission was patriotic. When she led the women of Israel in that oldest of all national anthems, 'Sing Unto the Lord', four centuries of bondage in Egypt had been lifted. It was a turning point in Israel's religious development and a woman led in its recognition." (p. 57)

As is the case of so many stories of women in the Bible, we have just snatches of Miriam's life. We hear nothing of her after she goes to get her mother to act as wet nurse for the princess' adopted son, until she leads the chorus in her song of deliverance at the Red Sea. In the Jewish tradition all sorts of stories of Miriam have grown up around the stories we have recorded in scripture. They include stories of Miriam as a lawyer, acting on behalf of the Hebrew women in Egypt. She became the poor women's advocate. If you are interested in exploring a good political, social and theological commentary about the women of the Exodus, you may want to read *Not Counting Women and Children: Neglected Stories from the Bible*, by Megan McKenna.

With the children we need to tell the story as it is in the Bible. In telling Miriam's story all at once, rather than only as parts of other stories, we get a clearer picture of how Miriam was part of the story of God's people for her whole life, rather than just in one or two settings. Miriam was given the title "prophetess" and "singer of hymns", (Deen, p.58) and has a unique place in the history of Israel. Many scholars believe that Moses, Aaron and Miriam formed a triad of leadership to help the people of Israel move from Egypt to their own land. Miriam seems to be given equal respect as a leader. In Micah 6:4 we read "I rescued you from Egypt, where you were slaves. I sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam to be your leaders." (Contemporary English Version).

The first part of the story recounts what may be a well-known story for the children. If the stories of baby Moses and the escape from Egypt have not been told before, they should be recounted briefly before the telling of this story. If the children do know those two stories you may ask them to tell you about them before you begin telling the Miriam story. There is some scholarly disagreement about the assurance that Miriam was the girl hiding next to the river when young Moses was set afloat by his mother. But in general consensus is that Miriam was there. In either case, her story follows the truth of the Hebrew account, even if we are unsure about the facts. The major emphasis about this first part of the story is how brave Miriam was. It was risky for the young girl hiding from those who would harm the baby. We have no indication that Miriam ever let on to the princess that the woman she brought was the child's own mother. Perhaps the princess suspected as much, but not from anything Miriam let slip.

The second part of our story, the song of Miriam after the crossing of the Red Sea is a very old text. Scholars believe that it and the song of Moses in the chapter before are two of the oldest known texts ever found. No doubt these songs of liberation and upset of a powerful enemy were kept sacred for the people of God and sung when they needed affirmation. The fact that Miriam led the singing gives us an understanding that she perhaps was leading the women, and probably the children, through the dry sea bed. Often women and children went as a group because they moved slower than the men who didn't have little ones to carry or urge along. We can almost see the women coming through the dry river, watching as the Egyptian soldiers are covered with water. Miriam may have burst into song, reaching for her tambourine to accompany her. The rhythm and melody were probably catchy so that others could quickly learn and join in.

In the end of our story today we hear the story of a less than heroic Miriam. Just like the rest of us, she was human. There is scholarly disagreement on the reason for Miriam's disagreement with Moses. Some say that Miriam was jealous that she didn't have the same relationship with God as did Moses. After all, she and Aaron were also prophets. Other scholars think it may have had more to do with her displeasure with Moses second wife. Moses second wife was a Cushite, an Ethiopian woman who was not a believer in Yahweh. They contend that Miriam may have resented her both on religious grounds and because, as Moses' wife she may have had more authority than Miriam. Whatever the reason, there was conflict between Miriam and Aaron and their brother Moses.

God confronted Miriam and Aaron and when God's presence left, Miriam was left with a powerful disease of leprosy. As such, she would have been sent away from the camp and left to live with others like herself. Aaron asked Moses to intervene and Moses prayed to God for Miriam to be healed. We understand that Miriam was healed, although she still spent the ritual seven days outside of the camp. The fact that the tribe didn't leave that camp area until Miriam returned to be among them indicates how highly they respected her.

The first wondering question asks what Miriam's song sounded like. Most children will respond from their own experience. Maybe they will believe it sounded like a church song. Or perhaps they will think it was more like a chant. The question is posed to help children begin to think of the songs in the Bible as having melody and rhythm.

The second wondering question asks why Miriam was made sick and Aaron was not. Some of the children may simply say that Miriam was sick before. In other words, they may take God completely out of the picture. Still others may say that Miriam was older so she should have known better. This will be a particularly difficult question for older children who are developing their sense of fairness. This is NOT fair! Every now and again a child may say that Miriam got sick so God could have Moses cure her. There is no simple answer to this question. The Bible is full of difficult issues like this one. Engaging children in thinking about these questions in the confines of a safe and loving church family environment gives them an assurance to keep questioning for the rest of their lives. It reminds all of us that staying in dialog with God and with each other is a lifelong task.

The final wondering question asks how Moses felt when his sister became ill. Most often the children will respond that he felt sad. Some may be so bold as to say he may have been angry with God. The question is included to remind the children that we are all connected. Even if we are not biological brothers and sisters, we are all part of God's family.

Wondering Questions (Part II)

Wondering Questions for Adults

1. How might a child hear this story? What might this story mean to a child?
2. Pastor Phil described Miriam as a brave, strong, and bold leader—even as a child. Who is the brave, strong, bold leaders that you know? Who in your life is a Miriam?
3. The worship song of Miriam chased away fears, and inspired courage among the community. What worship songs do that for you?
4. This week Pastor Phil described the Song of Miriam and other songs of our foremothers as songs that “[teach] us to sing away our fears with hope and praise of a loving and

faithful God, known in the saving presence of Christ ...our savior, who lives and reigns with a gentle and merciful presence and a strong and deliberate stride toward justice." How does the hymn *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, do that? (It should be noted that this hymn is considered the Black National Anthem of the United States of America).

Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring,
ring with the harmonies of liberty;
let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies,
let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;
sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod,
felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet
come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered;
we have come, treading our path thru the blood of the slaughtered,
out from the gloomy past, till now we stand at last
where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
thou who hast by thy might led us into the light,
keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee;
lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee;
shadowed beneath thy hand, may we forever stand,
true to our God, true to our native land.

Closing

Prayer

Holy God, for the songs of our foremothers, we give you thanks. Let our life be a melody dedicated to you. May our communal relationships be a harmony pleasing to you. When we witness your saving and liberating works, remind us to dance and praise. When we feel afraid and alone send the voice of your prophets, like Miriam, to restore our hope. **Amen.**

Study Link

<https://manchestrumc.org/all-church-study/>

Do you hear their song? Can you hear the melody? It's playing in your heart. It's softly humming a tune of prevenient grace, written for you, waiting for you to sing along. – Pastor Phil Estes