

# **A Good Shepherd Sacred Story**

## **Miriam**

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## **MIRIAM .... MA TERIALS**

-medium wicker basket to hold:

- wooden Miriam child figure
- wooden Miriam adult figure
- wooden Moses figure
- wooden Aaron figure
- wooden Jochebed figure
- wooden Amram figure



Miriam, child



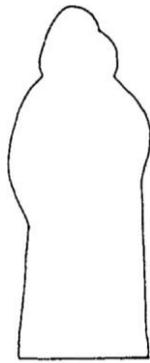
Miriam, adult



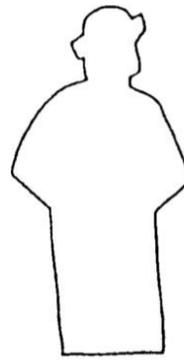
Moses



Jochebed



Amram



Aaron

## MIRIAM ... EXODUS 2, 15:19-21, NUMBERS 12, 20:1

### ACTIONS

After speaking, stand and get the story basket from the shelf and return to the circle

Allow 10-15 seconds of silence as you reverently touch one or more of the wooden figures to center yourself and the children.

Remove the child Miriam figure and place her in the center of the storytelling area

Place the figures of Jochebed, Amram, Moses and Aaron next to Miriam.

Move the girl Miriam and the Moses figure slightly to the front of the other figures.

Touch the Miriam figure and emphasize the word "very".

Move Jochebed to stand next to Miriam.

Rest your hand on Miriam as you speak.

Move Miriam back with the other figures.

### WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

All the words to this story are inside of me. Will you please make silence with me so I can find all the words to this story?

In the Bible in the books of Exodus and Numbers we read about a little girl who grew up to be a special woman of God.

Her name was Miriam. Her mother was named Jochebed and her father was Amram. She had two brothers, Moses and Aaron.

When she was a little girl, Miriam was sent to guard her brother Moses, when as a baby he was put in a basket in the Nile River to save his life.

Many of you will remember that story. Miriam was very brave. She didn't run away and leave the baby Moses alone.

When the princess came to the river and found the baby, Miriam ran to her and told her that she could find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. Then she brought her mother to the princess.

Everything she did could have gotten Miriam in trouble. The soldiers could have come, or the princess could have asked why she was there.

But Miriam was a very good big sister and a very brave little girl.

Remove the small Miriam figure and put the adult Miriam figure in her place.

Move all the figures forward slightly.

Starting with palms together, move your hands apart to indicate the separating of the water.

Set Miriam and Jochebed to one side.

Move Miriam and/or Jochebed slightly as though they are dancing as you speak

Touch the figures one by one as you speak.

Move all the figures except Aaron and Miriam back. Touch Miriam and Aaron as you speak about them

Move Miriam, Moses and Aaron further away from the group. Use a sad, quiet voice as you speak God's words.

We have no more stories of Miriam until she was grown up.

Miriam was with Moses and Aaron and the other people of God when they escaped from Egypt.

When the Pharaoh's soldiers tried to catch them, God made the water of the Red Sea part, so the people of God could walk through on dry land.

Miriam was leading the women. When they got to the other side the water came back and covered all the Pharaoh's soldiers.

Miriam took out her tambourine and led the other women to play their tambourines and dance while she sang, "Sing praises to the Lord for this great victory. God has thrown the horses and their riders into the sea."

Many times in the future the people of God would remember Miriam's song and sing it when they were afraid or worried. She was called a prophetess.

Things didn't always go so well for Miriam. One time she and her brother Aaron were complaining about Moses. They didn't like the woman Moses had married. They said, "Who does he think he is? God has spoken to us and not just to him."

God heard what they said. God came to Moses, Miriam and Aaron in a cloud and told Aaron and Miriam to come closer. Then God told them that Moses was God's chosen leader and they shouldn't say bad things about him.

Speak sadly and touch Miriam as you speak.

Move Moses to join Aaron and Miriam.

Touch the Moses figure as you speak.

Move Miriam FAR away from the group.

Move your hand over the group to include everyone

Return Miriam to the group.

Place all the wooden figures in the basket one at a time.

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to its shelf. Return to the circle and sit down.

Dismiss the children when everyone has had a chance to choose his/her work.

God became angry with Aaron and Miriam. When God left them Miriam had a terrible skin disease called leprosy.

When Aaron saw Miriam he said to Moses, "Please don't punish us for doing such a foolish thing. Don't let Miriam be so sick that she is like a dead person."

Moses prayed to God, "Lord God, please heal her."

God said, "Miriam will have to live outside of the camp for seven days."

The people of God stayed there until Miriam return seven days later.

Miriam came back into camp and lived with God's people until she died in the desert near the town of Kadesh. She was buried near there.

## WONDERING QUESTIONS

I wonder what Miriam's song sounded like?

I wonder why Miriam was punished with the disease but Aaron was not?

I wonder how Moses felt when his sister was sick?

Watch carefully how I put these materials away so you will know how to use them if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

Watch carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this story your work today or another day.

I wonder what you will do for your work today? Let's begin.

## MIRIAM ... TEACHER HELPS

The story of Miriam is scattered throughout the book of Exodus and Numbers. Many children 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 her 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 life long 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.

### SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

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?

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?

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?