

A Good Shepherd
Sacred Story

Let My People Go

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LET MY PEOPLE GO MATERIALS

- medium wicker basket to hold:
 - wooden figure of Moses=standing
 - wooden figure of Moses=kneeling
 - wooden figure of burning bush
 - 4 wooden people of God figures
 - 2 strips of blue felt (the sea)

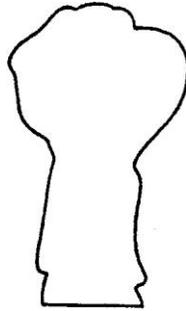
- desert box (optional)

This story is written to be told in the desert box. During the work/art response time, encourage the children to do it that way. If you have more than 12 children in your circle for the story presentation, we recommend telling the story on the floor without the desert box so all children can see.

- optional: Wicker basket lined with napkin to hold matzahs or unsalted soda crackers.

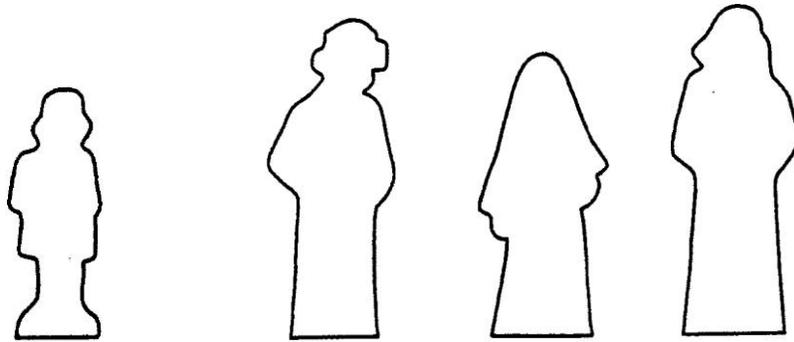


Moses - Standing



Moses - Kneeling

Burning Bush



People of God

LET MY PEOPLE GO •••• EXODUS 2:11-14:31

ACTIONS

After speaking, go to the shelf and carry the story back to the circle. Then walk to the desert box and pull it back to your place in the circle.

After speaking, allow 10-15 seconds of silence as you reverently stroke one of the wooden figures.

Overlap the shorter sides of the blue felt "sea" strips. Place to the far left of center.

Place the standing Moses figure at center in front of you and the desert box.

Touch your forehead as you "remember".

With one fist "beat" an imaginary Hebrew, by pretending to hit someone again and again.

Move standing Moses to the far right in the desert box.

Place burning bush a short distance from standing Moses in the desert box.

Move standing Moses up to the bush.

WORDS

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

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

Baby Moses, who had been put in a basket to save his life, grew up in the palace of the Pharaoh.

But he always remembered that he was one of the people of God.

One day when he was a man, he saw an Egyptian beating one of his people, the people of God.

Moses became so angry that he killed the Egyptian.

Then he ran away because he was afraid the Pharaoh would kill him.

Moses went to live in the desert where he took care of sheep.

One day, much later, when Moses was taking care of his sheep, he saw a bush.

The bush looked like it was on fire, but it wasn't being burned up.

Moses went to look at the bush.

Replace standing Moses figure with kneeling Moses figure and turn him away from the bush.

Touch the kneeling Moses figure.

Shake your head.

Touch the bush as you speak.

Shake your head quickly.

Nod confidently.

Replace kneeling Moses figure with standing Moses figure and move him back to center in front of you and the desert box.

Shake your head slowly.

Touch the standing Moses figure.

When he came close the voice of the Lord came out of the bush. "Take off your shoes, Moses. You are standing on holy ground. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Moses hid his face. He was afraid to look at God.

Then God said, "I've seen how badly my people are being treated. I know they are being hurt as slaves and I have come down to help them escape from the Pharaoh to a good, rich land, flowing with milk and honey. "

"I will send you, Moses, to the Pharaoh and you will lead my people out of Egypt. I will be with you all the time. "

Then Moses said, "I don't even know your name. How am I to tell the Pharaoh that my god sent me if I don't know your name."

The voice of the Lord said, "My name is I AM THAT I AM." In Hebrew that is Yahweh.

Moses didn't think he could speak well enough to talk to the Pharaoh. But God promised to send his brother Aaron to speak for him.

So Moses went back to Egypt and said to the Pharaoh, "Yahweh, the God of Israel, says, 'Let my people go that they may worship me.'"

But the Pharaoh said, "No."

Then many terrible things happened to the people in the land of Egypt. There was sickness and crops were destroyed.

Shake your head slowly.

Hold up one finger, as though in warning.

Speak very softly and look sad.

Pause and then shake your head.

Touch the imaginary blood and, with your palm out, "place" it on the imaginary door post.

Move your hand in an arc from left to right.

Close your eyes and shake your head sadly.

Raise your voice slightly. With your palm facing out, make a sweeping motion of moving something aside.

Place the four people of God figures to the right of the standing Moses.

Pat the bread into loaves.

Move the standing Moses and the four people of God figures towards the blue sea.

After each terrible event Moses would say to the Pharaoh, "Let my people go. "

But each time the Pharaoh said, "No."

Finally, Moses brought these words of Yahweh to the Pharaoh. "If you do not let my people go, a very sad thing will happen. All of the first-born children, cattle and sheep in Egypt will die. "

But Pharaoh still said, "No."

Then Moses told the people of God. "Kill a lamb and put the blood of the lamb on the doorpost of your house. For wherever there is the blood of the lamb, the angel of death will pass over the house and you will be safe. "

The people of God hurried to do what Moses had told them.

That night the angel of death passed over the houses of all the people of God. But in the houses of the Egyptians all the first-born died.

Finally Pharaoh said to Moses, "Go! Get out of Egypt. Take our money and jewels and fine clothing ... just leave!"

So Moses told the people of God to pack their things.

They made bread for the journey but they didn't have time to let it rise and get soft. They baked it right away so they could leave before the Pharaoh could change his mind.

Then they left, men, women and children, with all they owned.

Point at the people of God as though giving directions.

Stop the standing Moses and the people of God figures by the sea.

Lift both palms in wonderment.

Turn two of the people of God to look back toward Egypt.

Shake your head and smile.

Raise one arm. Part the "sea" by separating the strips of felt at the center. Bring the standing Moses and the four people of God figures through, one at a time.

Raise your arm again. Then overlap the felt pieces as they had been before to make a continuous "sea".

Touch each of the people of God figures.

But after they left the Pharaoh changed his mind.

He said to his soldiers, "Go after them and bring them back or I will have no slaves to do my work."

The people of God were now by the Red Sea. They looked at the water and said to Moses, "How are we to get across this place?"

Then they looked back and saw the Egyptian soldiers.

"Oh NO!" they said. "We should have stayed in Egypt. Now we will die."

But Moses said, "Don't be afraid. Yahweh will care for us. "

Then Yahweh told Moses to lift his rod over the waters. When he did, the water parted. The people of God came through the water to freedom on dry ground.

The Egyptian soldiers tried to follow the people of God through the river, but their chariot wheels soon became stuck.

Then Yahweh told Moses to raise his rod over the water again. This time the water came back and destroyed all the Egyptian soldiers.

And so the God named I AM THAT I AM, or Yahweh, led the people of God to freedom. Now they would not be slaves. Now they were free.

WONDERING QUESTIONS:

I wonder if the Pharaoh understood the name I AM?

I wonder if Moses was always afraid to talk to the Pharaoh?

I wonder if God was sad when the Egyptian soldiers were destroyed?

Optional:

At this time you may pass around a wicker basket lined with a napkin and containing matzahs or unsalted soda crackers. Invite the children to taste the unleavened bread and discuss why it is the way it is. If some don't want to taste it now, tell them you will set it on the shelf next to the basket of story figures and they may taste it during the work/art response time today if they wish.

Put all the wooden pieces and the felt strips back into the basket.

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

After speaking, stand and carry the basket back to its shelf. Pull the desert box back to its place. Return to the circle.

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

Dismiss the children to their work only after everyone has had a chance to choose what they will do.

I wonder what you will make your work today? Let's go around the circle and decide.

LET MY PEOPLE GO TEACHERHELPS

This story is a pivotal one for the Hebrew people. In the story of the Exodus God not only makes a covenant but makes sure that covenant is worked out. In this story God "sees ... , hears ... , knows ... , and comes down to deliver." (Exodus 3:7-8) God experiences the pain and suffering of the people of God and does something about it. Moses, who was drawn out of the water as an infant, and raised as an Egyptian, is called to be the holy man of God for the

purpose of deliverance from slavery. After Moses kills the Egyptian who is beating the Hebrew slave, he runs for his life. While in hiding, Moses is in the wilderness. Mt. Horeb, where Moses sees the burning bush, is the same mountain that is later called Mt. Sinai. It is from this mountain that Moses receives the ten commandments. Moses lived for an important part of his life in the very wilderness through which God would have him lead God's people on their way to the promised land.

Notice that from this very long narrative we leave out the particulars of nine of the plagues. The emphasis of this story is to be on God's compassion for God's people, not on the horrors of the plagues. For the older child who is curious about the plagues, refer them to either the Bible or a bible story book appropriate for their age. Neither do we make a celebration out of the death of the Egyptian soldiers. We treat it and the "angel of death" as a sad occurrence.

It is from this time when the angel "passed over" the homes of the people of God that we get the tradition of Passover. Many times we will have a basket of matzahs available with the story to allow the children to experience tasting the unleavened bread. Each Passover the Jewish people still have unleavened bread and lamb (from the animal killed to produce blood for the doorpost).

I know that many of you have wonderment about the crossing of the Red Sea. Did the waters really part like a wall on each side? If the people of God came through on dry ground, then how did the chariots get mired down in the mud a short time later? Most scholars believe that the Hebrews crossed the Yam Suph or Reed Sea in the swampy land between the town of Zilu and the Bitter Lakes. (Harper's Introduction to the Bible, Gerald Hughes and Stephen Travis, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981, p. 18) I've struggled as to what I should call this sea in the story for the children. I've decided to stay with the text and call this the Red Sea, as do the Scriptures. The important point in the story here is not how the children of God were taken to freedom, but THAT the children of God were taken to freedom. God did as God promised. God saw, heard, knew and delivered. It is no wonder that the Exodus became the focal point of Jewish history and the greatest memory for the Jewish nation.

The wondering questions begin with a wonderment about the name I AM THAT I AM. I've done this because I'm sure the children will think, "What on earth does that mean?" The name Yahweh means that God was active and present in the affairs of the people of God. (The New Oxford Annotated Bible RSV, edited by Herbert May and Bruce Metzger, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 70) This allows us to introduce the name of God again for the children. The name Yahweh was to give assurance to the people of God that Yahweh would indeed be active and do all the things promised in the conversation with Moses. This was to be an understanding for the Pharaoh as well. But Pharaoh did not take the words of warning given to him by Yahweh through Moses.

The second wondering question asks if we think Moses was always afraid to speak to Pharaoh. This question allows Moses to become a real person. All children, and adults, can

think of a time when they were afraid to talk. The children may' conclude that Moses did continue to be afraid of Pharaoh, or they may decide that after a while Moses was not afraid. Maybe they will think that with God on Moses' side, he would not be as afraid or perhaps that after Moses talked to Pharaoh again and again, he would become less afraid. The opportunity for growth through this question is that God is always with each of us, even when we feel afraid.

The last question leaves open our understanding that all the creatures of this world are people of God, in a very broad sense. This question allows us to speak with sadness about the death of even our enemies. In the larger sense this will help to develop the child's theology that God will only be completely joyful when all the creatures of the world are filled with life and not death. God does not take joy in punishment. God rejoices in goodness and right living.

This very important story of the Exodus will be told each year until it becomes as comfortable to the children as the nativity story. In this story we have the option of using all the senses for learning. By incorporating the unleavened bread we use sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. The greatest learning occurs when the most senses are used.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

Once the people of God were at the Red Sea they became afraid for their lives and wanted to go back to Egypt. Think of something you've started to do and then changed your mind. What did you do? How did you feel?

In this story God seems to be involved in the death of many people. What role do you think God has in the death of people?

God kept the people of God safe. Think of a time when you were in trouble or afraid. Did you sense God's presence with you? How did feel about God at that time?