

Sea Waves and Reeds Covered Me  
Sermon for Christmas Day  
Sermon Text: Exodus 2:1-10



*Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. <sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. <sup>3</sup> When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. <sup>4</sup> And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. <sup>5</sup> Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. <sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." <sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" <sup>8</sup> And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. <sup>9</sup> And 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. <sup>10</sup> When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, "Because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."*

If you want to travel to Greece on vacation and accidentally book a flight to Alaska, you experience a pretty horrific shock when the door of the airplane opens and instead of seeing palm trees and sunny beaches, you see ice and snow. It makes you pause and ask: "Wait a minute, something's gone wrong!" Perhaps we all feel this way when we read today's sermon text. We came to church and wanted to sing joyful Christmas carols about the birth of Jesus. We wanted to marvel at the child next to Mary and Joseph in the manger. We wanted to rejoice that God is among us. And who do we see there? Not sweet Baby Jesus in a manger, but Moses who was fished out of the dirty Nile River. On the inside, we protest: "We wanted to see Jesus! Especially at Christmas! Did we get something mixed up? Somehow, I was expecting to hear about a different child at Christmas – not baby Moses, but Baby Jesus!" However, when we look to the mystery of Jesus' birth, we cannot and may not exclude Moses. Because without Moses, there would be no Bethlehem and without Mt. Sinai, there would be no Golgotha. For if God had not given us the 10 Commandments through Moses on Mt. Sinai, we would not have known why it was necessary for Jesus to come into the world and die on Golgotha for the sins of all people. If we want to understand the mystery of Jesus' birth, we must therefore widen our perspective and look to the Old Testament. There, like a golden thread, we see repeated references to God's plan of salvation, references to Jesus and to the manger. When Moses' mother placed her child in a basket covered in pitch, she did so with blind faith in the God of Israel, whom she had come to know as Savior. In this same faith, Noah and his family entered a similar box covered in pitch. In the case of Moses, however, the story took an unexpected turn because the rescue came from an unexpected place and with great ambiguity: Pharaoh's daughter, of all people, discovered the child. By exclaiming: "This is one of the Hebrews' children," Pharaoh's daughter pronounced his death sentence. According to Pharaoh's decree, every son born to the Hebrews was to be killed. But things turned out differently. Moses was saved! Just as Noah was saved through the ark, Moses was saved through his basket. In both cases, it is written in very large letters that God has a hand in it all. God creates salvation through His plan, which seems not only vague but impossible for humans to understand. Yet God brings His will to save all people to fruition. God doesn't do this with power or evidence, so that the mind can understand where God is in His power. No, God does it inconspicuously – with a basket in Moses' case and a manger in Jesus' case.

It is a mystery. It is neither recognizable to human understanding that man needs salvation, nor is it understandable that man should be saved by a baby in a manger of all things. Both the birth of Moses and the birth of Jesus are set against the backdrop of visible human powers that ruled the world at that time. On the one side is Pharaoh, who had announced the death of all male Hebrew babies. And on the other side is Herod, who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth. Both Pharaoh and Herod were familiar with power. They could rely on their might! They knew it worked. Wherever there was a problem, a royal command could remove it. Yet both Pharaoh and Herod failed because of their power. The failure of these two royal houses fundamentally calls

human power into question. Aren't the powerful still on the move today and firmly convinced that they can solve all problems through power and money? But we must look even deeper. Haven't we also become far too accustomed to relying on the things that give us safety and security in this world? Many of you are young parents. You will then understand what it is like when you are given a child. You want the very best for your child. No money or effort is spared in making sure your child is healthy and has a good foundation for life. But is that enough? Has this solved all the problems for your child? Can we even do that? Yes, we really need to look at ourselves and ask the question: Are we not also at the end of our ropes, like Herod and Pharaoh, and at a loss when faced with huge problems that we cannot clear away for ourselves or for our children? And ultimately, we must recognize that we don't have unlimited power and freedom. On the contrary, we are helpless and vulnerable!

Both baby Moses and Baby Jesus show us this vulnerability very vividly because both Moses in his basket and Jesus in His manger were doomed to die there. For this reason, the wisemen from the East brought Jesus myrrh as a gift, which was already hinting at His death. Through both the story of Moses and Jesus' birth, God wants to draw our attention to the fact that we are in mortal danger and therefore in need of salvation. And above all, God wants to draw our attention to the fact that we are doomed to die. We are the ones in need and who are in mortal danger in the waves of sin and death. We must pray: *"all Your waves and Your billows passed over me. Then I said, 'I am driven away from Your sight... The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever..."* (Jonah 2:3b-6). When we understand all this, we have come close to the secret of Christmastime. But isn't that a real damper on the Christmas spirit? Just like the person who booked a flight to Greece only to arrive in Alaska instead. Instead of joy and peace, we encounter something dangerous and threatening. Yes, that really captures the Christmas spirit, because our Christmas has two sides: on the one hand, there are the bright lights of Christmas. People have a very strong desire for it to be a wonderful time. There should be peace in the family. There should also be peace in our world. Special meals are prepared, presents exchanged. Some children's wishes and perhaps also the wishes of adults are fulfilled. As always, however, we know that Christmas also has a threatening backdrop. Some people have become strangers to each other. Family celebrations become a farce and we hear that the guns are not silent in war zones. People will die today too; people will also hear the sad news that a loved one has died today. And here we have arrived at the very place where the original Christmas was celebrated. The shepherds, the wisemen, Mary and Joseph, and everyone else stood adoringly before the child. They were well aware of death, danger, and threats. Yet somehow, they knew at the manger that everything would be alright now! And it will be OK because God wanted it to be this way! Like Noah walking onto the ark with confidence, just like Moses' mother laid her child in the basket with confidence, we too look at the child in the manger with confidence and know: "Through Him, all will be well!"

I admit that believing in the child in the manger is a great challenge for our minds. Just as it was for Moses' mother when she had to entrust her child to the unknown of the Nile River in a basket covered in pitch, we face the same challenge when we carry our children to baptism. Through baptism, we throw our children into the waters of baptism in blind faith and pull them out again from there. The words are spoken in accordance with Jesus' command: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!" The mind asks: "Is that really enough?" At Christmas, God wants us to listen carefully to this great act of salvation in our lives. We are also baptized and it doesn't matter whether we are baptized as adults or as children. Like Moses, we are saved from the waters of destruction. In Hebrew, the name Moses means drawn out of water. We too can see ourselves as being drawn out of the water. Through our baptism, we are both baptized into Moses' basket and into the manger. That is why we can recognize God's quiet voice in all stages of life and especially when everything is going haywire. There are certainly many parallels in the various life situations in which we find ourselves. Moses was fished out of the Nile to grow up in the royal house, we were taken through the dangerous waters of sin, death, and the devil as babies and adults. But thank God we did not have to fight against such dangerous enemies ourselves. Jesus Himself did all of this for us. Jesus Himself fished us out of the dangerous waters through baptism and now He has not let us grow up in Pharaoh's house but in His own Father's house. We may be called God's children. We may therefore share in His glory. Amen.