Moses

[We are going to trace the stories of the Jesse Tree right up through the branches of the people who carried the story of God’s love.]

A long time in the past, about 400 years after the time that Jacob, Joseph and all his family moved to Egypt, Moses walked on a hillside in the land of Midian. Moses was caring for the sheep, taking them to the few green plants so that they could eat and taking them to the water so that they could drink. He cared for them each day, walking miles across the hills. Moses could remember being a prince in Egypt but now he was a shepherd. He used to wear fine Egyptian robes and walk on the cool marble floors of the palace, but now he wore rough wool and cotton and sat on a hot and dusty hillside in the heat of the day.

Moses spent his childhood in an Egyptian palace, even though he was descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and so was not Egyptian at all. It happened like this: when Moses was a baby, the Pharaoh of Egypt passed a law that all the male Israelite babies in Egypt were to be killed. Moses’ mother and father made a basket and covered it with some sticky stuff called pitch to make it waterproof. They put Moses inside the basket and floated it among the bulrushes at the edge of the river. Their plan was to hide Moses and keep him safe. One day Moses began to cry in his basket, just when the Pharaoh’s daughter was swimming in the river, near the bulrushes. Pharaoh’s daughter heard the baby’s cries, and sent her servant to find the child. She guessed that Moses was one of the Israelite baby boys, and that his parents had hidden him to try to keep him safe. She decided to rescue the child. She took Moses to the palace and adopted him. He was brought up as if he was her own child, as if he was the Pharaoh’s grandson.

At that time, the Israelite people were slaves in Egypt and were treated very harshly. When Moses grew up he realised two things – he saw that the Israelites were treated very badly and he found out that, although he lived in the palace, he, too, was really an Israelite. Moses wanted to make things better for his people. He used to travel out from the cool palace to the place where the Israelites were making bricks. He watched them working and he tried to make sure they were treated fairly. One day, he got into an argument with the Egyptian in charge of a group of Israelite workers. The Egyptian was being very cruel to the Israelites – he was making them work too hard and whipping them if they slowed down. Moses tried telling the Egyptian off, but it did no good. Moses became angry and hit the Egyptian. They had a fight and the Egyptian died. Now Moses had to flee to a different country, because the Pharaoh became his enemy. This was how he came to be sitting on a dusty hillside in the land of Midian, looking after sheep.
One day Moses looked up and saw a bush which had caught fire. This often happened in the heat. Moses watched it, expecting that it would become a pile of ash, utterly destroyed and lost, as his life in Egypt was lost. Moses watched the bush carefully. It continued to burn, but it did not burn up. The flames were bright and moving, but the branches still stretched out to the sky. Moses decided to go nearer and look at this wonderful bush.

When Moses came nearer, he heard a voice from inside the bush. The voice said, ‘Take off your shoes, Moses, because this is holy ground.’ Moses took off his shoes. The voice said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.’ Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to see the face of God. God said that he had heard the cries of the people of Israel who were suffering as slaves in Egypt. God told Moses to return to Egypt and speak to the Pharaoh and tell him to let the people go.

Moses was afraid and he said to God, ‘Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?’ God answered, ‘I will be with you. I promise that when you have led the people out of Egypt, you will bring them to this very mountain to worship me again.’

And Moses travelled back to Egypt and he did speak to the Pharaoh and, after many strange and frightening things had happened, he did lead the people out of Egypt. All his life, Moses remembered this mountain where he had heard the voice of God in a burning bush. When the people came from Egypt, it was on this very same mountain that Moses received the ten commandments and the law from God. This was the beginning of the people’s new life of freedom.

[We hang a picture of a burning bush on the tree today to remember the moment when God called Moses to be a great leader and set his people free.]

**A moment to wonder**

I wonder how Moses felt when he was a shepherd in Midian? Do you think that going back to Egypt would be better than being a shepherd or worse?

**A prayer**

As green as a healthy tree, the story of God’s love keeps growing. We remember Moses, who was brave enough to speak to the Pharaoh. We pray for everyone who speaks up to try to make the world a fairer place.

Amen.