



Mothers of Moses

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Libretto

1. And the house filled with light (Miriam)
Even before my mother's belly swelled
With the son that Pharaoh banned,
I knew that deliverance was at hand.

God opened my eyes, and I prophesied:
"You will give birth to the redeemer of Israel!"

And when she did deliver her child,
The house filled with light like the sun,
And we sang with joy,
And we sang with joy.
Deliverance had begun.

What a consolation for broken hearts:
A redeemer to topple Egypt!

2. A cry in the night (Yocheved)
A cry in the night—
Is it my son, yearning for my breast?
Or a neighbor, not so blessed,
Whose son they drowned?

Or is it the cry of the assassin,
Tormenting a people already so oppressed?
Is that the cry in the night?

Or is it I who cry in the night,
Afraid my baby might betray,
Give us all away
To Pharaoh's spies?

O God, I sigh in the night,

What of your promise, "numerous as sand,"
A milk-and-honey promised land?
Why don't you hear us cry in the night?

3. A great house without children (Asiya)
So what if I, Asiya bint Muzahim,
Wear the crown of Egypt,
Feast on roast goose and stork, leeks and garlic?
What is a great house without a child?
My husband, the mighty Fir'awn,
Proclaims he is a god.
Cannot a god awake a barren womb?

Great Isis, you are a mother.
Hear my plea and answer me!
O goddess, I know you always protect me.
With your help, I know I am never alone.

4. Miriam's Prayer (Miriam)
Calm yourself, O mighty Nile!
Away, O hungry crocodile!
Spare my brother for this while,
As he drifts by, mile by mile,
Rescued by my mother's guile.
O God, please help him brave this trial.
On him, let Your compassion smile!

5. A comfort of the eye (Asiya, Yocheved, Miriam)
Miriam: The day dawned bright,
but my mother's heart was dark
When she went to the river to cast out her son.

Yocheved: Of rushes I made his tiny ark,

Lined with bitumen, smeared with pitch.
I placed it among the reeds
To protect him from the sun.

Miriam: I watched it float on the tide,
Until it came to rest along the riverside
Where Pharaoh's house came to bathe.

Asiya: When my maids brought the basket to me,
Behold--A child weeping.
I pitied him, "one of the Hebrews' children."
When Pharaoh wished to slay him,
I said: "A comfort of the eye for you and me.
Let us adopt him as our son.
Perhaps he may be a boon to us."
He knew not this boy was his doom.

Miriam: I came to Pharaoh's wife and said,
"Shall I go and find a nurse from the Hebrew women?"
For the child refused to suckle at a pagan breast.

Asiya: "Go." And the girl called the boy's mother.
"Take this child, and nurse it for me."
Then I knew the promise of God was true.

Miriam: My mother nursed my brother, and he grew.

Yocheved: And I gave him the Hebrew name, Moses,
For out of the water I drew him.

Asiya: And I gave him the Egyptian name, Mes,
For it was as a son I knew him.

6. Build me a house in Paradise (Asiya, Yocheved)

Asiya:
Lord, build me a house in paradise.
Deliver me from Pharaoh, cruel, unjust.
O God, reward my sacrifice.

Let not the lure of pleasure entice
Me to betray Your trust.
Lord, build me a house in paradise.

Yocheved:
Two years as his nurse must suffice,
As into another's arms my son I thrust.
O God, reward my sacrifice!

Free Your people from their narrow vise!
Raise their shattered bodies from the dust!
Lord, build them a house in paradise!

Asiya:
Willingly I pay the greatest price.
To die for Allah as I now must.
O God, reward my sacrifice!

Miriam, Yocheved, Asiya:
Ten brutal plagues, our people's purchase price;
Freedom's prize, a hasty crust.
Lord, build us a house in paradise!
O God, reward our sacrifice!