

The birth of Moses has many significant parallels with the birth of Christ; both were born into perilous situations, physically in terms of where they were spent their first days and weeks – Christ in a manger with livestock, Moses in a basket on a river – but also the wider threat, in both cases, from the rulers of the day, Pharaoh and Herod, who want all male Hebrew babies to be executed. Pharaoh's gruesome instruction is that they be thrown into the Nile. Moses is literally floating on it, and is if his chances of survival could get any slimmer, who should find him but Pharaoh's daughter who, one would imagine, would be keen to carry out her father's wishes. But at this moment of maximum peril, of maximum jeopardy - when she sees the baby she shows a simple and beautiful humanity – 'He was crying and she felt sorry for him.' In a sense therefore, it was the very fact that he was a vulnerable and helpless child that saved his life.

This jeopardy continues throughout Moses life which will be explored over the next few weeks – he is given the monumental task of freeing the Israelites from slavery; he doubts his ability to lead them at all, let alone to the promised land. 'Who am I' he asks when confronted with God in the burning bush? It is a question we can ask ourselves, who am I, what can I really do? And God's answer to us and Moses is simple 'I will be with you'. But circumstance can sometimes make this promise difficult to believe.

We generally credit the experience of adulthood as a good thing – that our years of existence give us wisdom. But is it a heavenly wisdom? Do the trials of life, the fears, the heartbreak, the disappointments, do they actually create a barrier between us and God's promises. Phrases such as I don't want to tempt fate or touch wood are earthly attempts to protect ourselves.

This concept is described perfectly by a phrase that God repeats three times in Exodus Chapter 14, when Pharaoh has decided to pursue Moses and the escaping Israelites; he says 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart.' Rather than simply threatening to lay waste to the Egyptians, God uses this very specific and pointed description – the heart is obviously referring to our spiritual core, our soul and the well of our emotions. A hardened heart is one that does not let God in, and in Pharaoh's case, one that relies instead on their own earthly power and plan.

The phrase is repeated in Hebrews Chapter 3 as a warning against unbelief – 'Today, if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness.'; and Christ himself uses it in Mark chapter 10 when questioned and tested by the Pharisees on the subject of divorce stating, 'it was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law.'

The antithesis to a hardened heart is described in our gospel reading – the guidance of children, with Christ explicitly stating 'unless you change and become like little children, you

will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Some of you may remember a series of wonderful Heinz adverts televised in the late 1990s showing various scenarios in daily life; there was no dialogue simply the beautiful sound of South African Choir, Ladysmith Black Mambazo. My particular favourite showed a day in the life of a family with three children; the eldest boy, presumably aged around thirteen, ensures his considerably younger brother and sister get safely to and from school. Having got home he picks up his younger brother's coat from the floor, he puts a magnificent supper of sausages and chips in the oven, he gently dissuades his sister from raiding the biscuit barrel and is laying the table as his mother and father get home from work. The family enjoy supper together with meals covered in ketchup and the older brother is then seen playing with his siblings in the garden – the advert concludes with the proverb, 'here's to the child and all they can teach us'.

The innocence of Children allows them to believe without question, to dream without fear or cynicism. When I was a child I regularly stated my firm intention to be a millionaire – I had no plan for a career that would earn me that level of wealth, and that was because I thought being a millionaire was a job in itself, and I could not for the life of me understand why everyone did not do this extremely well paid occupation because then no one would be poor. The point of that story is to illustrate the huge difference between belief and knowledge.

When I was reading Exodus and a synopsis of Moses life, it is difficult to take in. The drama of his discovery and adoption by Pharaoh's daughter is merely the beginning. By the end of Exodus chapter 2 he has grown up, murdered an Egyptian, breaking one of the ten commandments he would later receive. This sweeping saga of monumental events – challenges our adult human logic, there is a conflict between belief and knowledge. Because our hearts are fragile things, it is natural to want to protect them, harden them with cynical armour against the difficulties of this earthly life, but it is precisely a soft, open, albeit vulnerable, and childlike heart that the Holy Spirit can fill.

The great Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo believed that the figure he would go onto carve already lay within the stone, it simply had to be revealed; our spiritual selves, our souls, the version of us that will see God is the same. Like the infant Moses, we will all be in peril, we will all stand on the edge of the precipice, we will all be tested, one only has to consider what various members of our church family are going through - we just need to hold onto the wisdom of the child, to believe in God's promise to Moses - that He will with us - before, and during and after all our trials, however they turn out- and even at the last, having taken our final breath, he will be waiting for us on the other side. Amen

Michael Grist, 27 September 2026