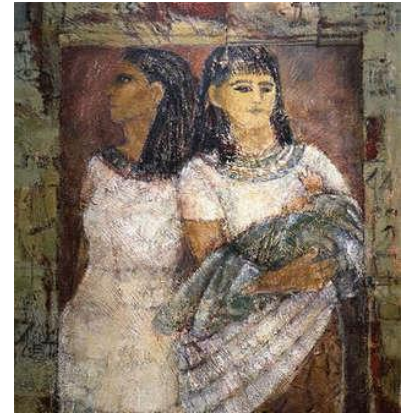


## **God of Deliverance!**

God of Miriam and Moses, you are our help from age to age. Accept our worship, our living sacrifice and transform us by your spirit that being members of one true body, we may dare to pray together in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Image of Shiphrah & Puah. Midwives who literally delivered thousands from slaughter. "Historically, the earliest known example of civil disobedience in the face of a specific command by a powerful regime to disobey the law of God."*  
@livingbelief



Exodus 1 v 8- 2 v10 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

## **Psalm 124**

Matthew 16 v 13-20 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

## **Reflection from Matthew Stone**

Who do *they* think I am? Who do *you* think I am? Jesus uses these questions to draw a distinction between different people who view him in different ways.

The disciples have started to realise the true identity of Jesus, while the Israel that surrounds them, is blind to it. The popular belief is that Jesus is a Prophet, but the disciples instead declare him "Messiah, Son of the living God".

This isn't the disciples finally 'getting-it' as portrayed in the earlier gospel of Mark. Matthew instead presents the confession of Jesus as messiah, as the formation of a movement seeking to renew the people of God.

Later, in Matthew 21:43, Jesus does not mince his words when he tells the pharisees that they have forsaken the Kingdom of God. Instead, it's stewardship will be given to a new people.

This new 'church' is created in conflict. Just as a pearl forms by the irritation caused by grains of sand trapped in an oyster, groups form when people are crushed by a broken society.

In the view of Jesus, Israel's religious elite has forgotten what is at the heart of the Kingdom of God and this is draining the wisdom and life out of their faith. As the Romans occupy Israel their religion has become a monolithic tome of law rather than a thriving spirit of humanity. Israel is broken and dying, its people bristles with discontent. Because of this, a new community, led by Jesus and with Peter as it's foundational 'rock', challenges the leaders of Israel and their suffocating rule.

Many years before, the Israelites were enslaved in Pharaoh's Egypt and grew within a society poisoned by slavery. The Exodus reading shows the captive race also beginning to challenge the broken culture around it.

The forces of Hades, as Jesus puts it, attacks these groups which rise against it, but is blind to the fact they exist because of its burden.

We have always faced conflict and seen new groups challenge old orders. Today is no different. While some can fly freely others are trapped. Whole generations may never have a future to enjoy.

It was only late last year whilst sitting in Henderson's, enjoying a coffee and a Chelsea bun, when my relaxation was quickly disturbed by shouting from the Market Square. The commotion came from a group of school children, they were demanding action on climate change.

When I look at my daughter and imagine the world she and those school-children will have to live in, it's not surprising it is their voices crying out for a better future.

Not only do we have prophets to warn us that something big is broken, we also can glimpse a better future. The lock-down, allowed us briefly to see a new world. We could hear birds sing, wildlife thrived and the air seemed cleaner. Then it was gone. But we had seen something better, and I think many of us want it back. We want a Kingdom of God not of Hades.

It is easy to see where poison inflames our community, where the oyster presses down on people, but to ease that pressure requires enormous effort. How can we ever hope to fix it?

Similar struggles appear in our psalms, but they also proclaim hope and deliverance. Today, Psalm 124 declares that with God beside us we are not overwhelmed or swallowed by the challenges we face. "...Our help is in the name of the Lord..." the Psalm says.

The strength binding the disciples together came from the name of Jesus and his identity.

These are not miracles falling from the sky, there is no magic. Instead divinity is at work amongst us and is alive today. Prayer sustains us. Scripture guides us. Our world calls for renewal and that is our calling and challenge.

### **HYMN REFLECTION MGS**

It would be interesting to know how many hymns are still sung in their original form and to the tunes (if any) the authors intended. Amazing Grace has been changed in lots of ways since John Newton first wrote it, and I would suggest that we try another change next time we sing it (see last paragraph).

Newton was a slave trader. His ship was caught in a terrible storm off the coast of Co. Donegal in 1748. He prayed for deliverance, and was saved. That was the beginning of his conversion, and of this hymn, though he did not abandon the slave trade for another six years. He wrote the poem to illustrate a sermon on Christmas Day 1773. Nobody knows whether it was sung or not. He "borrowed" the phrase "amazing grace" from two earlier hymns, and he did not write the last verse at-all (When we've been here a thousand years). That first appeared in the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and has been attached to at least two hymns. One version changed even the first two lines, because somebody did not like singing that he was a wretch. The words are printed below as in the original 1779 *Olney Hymns*.

And the tune! The tune we think we know was called *New Britain*, but at least twenty different tunes have been used to the words, and there are almost as many variations of *New Britain*. Does the first syllable have one note or two? Does the third syllable have two notes or a triplet? Try it in the privacy of your home. *BBC Songs of Praise* has two different versions within one cover. And whatever is written, successive American solo singers, from President Obama downwards, have completely ruined it in the ears of anyone even slightly musical. They overload it with so much emotion and sentiment, so way over the top that there is no recognisable rhythm.

If the original words are sung properly to a tune everybody agrees on, it is a very moving hymn. So I suggest we try singing it to *St. Columba* - a similar sort of tune, and appropriate in that it is of Irish origin.

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound) That sav'd a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears reliev'd;  
How precious did that grace appear, The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares I have already come;  
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis'd good to me His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be As long as life endures.

Yes, when this heart and flesh shall fail, And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess within the veil A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, The sun forbear to shine,  
But God, who call'd me here below, Will be for ever mine.