

# Johebed

*Brenna Swoboda*

The pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile..." Exodus 1:22

Unknown to sleeping infants  
But to the horror of the slaves  
Word had begun to spread  
That soon our young sons would be slain.

Hearing the edict given  
Each child's mother stifled gasps  
Each mother clung to her baby  
Each child torn from a mother's grasp.

The streets were full of wailing  
So much, I could no longer bear  
I fled down to the river  
Taking my young son with me there.

Hidden among the rushes  
I crouched low, shielded by the reeds  
Breathing desperate prayers to God  
I held my child on my knees.

The screams in the streets faded,  
A muffled grief for children lost.  
A chance for his life I took  
No matter how much it cost.

Having brought my handiwork,  
A skillfully woven basket,  
I placed my son inside it  
Hoping it not be his casket.  
With new eyes I watched him float.  
How could I bear for him to go?  
My internal organs heaved,  
But I could not let feelings show.

The thoughts and dreadful worries  
That assaulted my victim mind!  
Would fishers spear or boats crush  
This basket, this treasure of mine?

In panicked thought I lunged in,  
Feeling the water soak me through.  
But the basket was too far  
For my arms to reach out to.

Too quickly my vision failed me  
No sight through a river of tears  
I pulled myself onto the bank,  
Trying to collect my fears.

I returned to the brick work.  
Hours later my breasts had swelled.  
My daughter then came to me  
With some shocking news to tell.

Like her mother, she had hidden  
From the terror in all the streets  
She had seen me release him,  
And she followed him down the stream.

She mentioned the royal palace,  
Brushing bits of clay from my hair.  
With urgency and wide eyes  
She demanded we hurry there.

After the princess told me,  
"I have claimed this boy as my own,"  
To nurse he was given me,  
And astounded I took him home.

Months of nurturing flew by,  
Days were filled with uneasy thoughts  
Grateful for time spent with him,  
But again, to me he'd be lost!

No more I'd feel his body  
Curling snugly into my chest.  
Nor stroke his smooth little cheek,  
Or have one night of peaceful rest.

Why worry? I asked myself  
He'll be a prince and not a slave!  
I've nothing but chains to give,  
For that I feel deeply ashamed.

My duty came to an end,  
Pharaoh's daughter surely pleased.  
I handed away my son,  
And I somehow managed to leave.

The alabaster hallways  
Bright and glad, so unlike my heart  
Echoed broken hearted sobs  
I released now that we're apart.

Is this, in some way, mercy?  
An answered prayer, but high in price.  
One goodbye was too many,  
But I am forced to say it twice.