



5 ways

to rejoice in the miracle

With reference to the Red Sea crossing, St John Chrysostom says to those preparing for baptism, “*The Israelites witnessed marvels; you also will witness marvels...*” During the Easter season, take time to give thanks for Easter faith, to rejoice with family/friends over the marvellous ways the Lord has blessed you and freed you in your life’s journey. Whether dramatic or subtle, take time to ‘share the miracle,’ perhaps during a conversation over a shared meal.

Faces. Think of the faces of those who have been special messengers of God’s presence in your life. They taught you to love, they taught you to know the Lord. *Share the miracle of special people in your life...*

Family. Some families marvel at the way faith has been passed down through the generations, often ‘against all odds.’ Is this your story? *Share the miracle of persistent faith...*

Fire. Was there a time in your life which was especially difficult, when your faith was ‘tested by fire’?

Share the miracle of courage and perseverance...

Partnership. Was there a time in your life when, like Moses, you felt God’s ‘glorious arm’ on yours in an especially powerful way? What was it like, this experience of human-divine partnership? *Share the miracle...*

Surprise. Think of a time when the joys and blessings of God’s action in your life exceeded all your expectations of what was possible. *Share the miracle of God’s surprise...*

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

In our *Light of Torah* series this week, we interrupt our usual Torah schedule to accommodate the liturgical high point of the Christian calendar.

Both the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter are festivals of liberation and renewal. Passover celebrates liberation from slavery and the freedom of a people called to live in Covenant with God; Easter celebrates Christ’s resurrection which Christians believe inaugurates the beginning of the messianic era (a reality still unfolding in history) in which the Gentiles are also drawn into covenantal relationship with God.

Our choice of Torah reading this week is Exodus 15. Having been brought safely through the Red Sea, the Israelites break into song and dance, celebrating their salvation by the mighty hand of God. At the Easter Vigil in Catholic churches, this victory song led by Moses is sung as a response to the third reading (Exodus), and it goes no further than verse 18. If we read on, however, we find reference to the victory song led by Miriam. Our Torah discussion here takes up these verses.



Easter reflection

Exodus 15



Light of Torah
www.lightoftorah.net

Text: Teresa Pirola
Design: Sarann Ryan
© Light of Torah, 2012

Light of Torah is a ministry arising from the Catholic community. In the spirit of Vatican II’s call to Jewish-Christian reconciliation, Light of Torah encourages Torah reflection in homes and parishes, drawing on the insights of Jewish interpretative traditions. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial pastoral use.



Torah Portion

Exodus 15

As the band of Hebrew refugees flee from Pharaoh's army, God intervenes by parting the Red Sea and bringing them through on dry ground. Safely encamped on the other side, the Israelites break into song and dance, celebrating their salvation by the mighty hand of God.

1. *Mekhilta* 10:84.

Bibliography: Eskenazi & Weiss, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* (NY, 2008); Frankel, *The Five Books of Miriam*, (San Francisco, 1996); Goldstein, *The Women's Torah Commentary* (Woodstock, Vermont, 2000); Scripture: *NRSV*.

Tasting Torah

"Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." (Ex. 15:20-21)

Who is Miriam? Our text tells us she is Aaron's sister. Thus she is also Moses' sister. In Exodus we see all three siblings exert leadership in the Israelites' desert journey. Says the prophet Micah: *"I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam" (6:4)*. We first meet Miriam in the opening chapters of Exodus (2:4) where she keeps watch over her baby brother in the reeds during his escape from Pharaoh's soldiers. Yet the first time we hear her named 'Miriam' is in today's Torah portion.

Touching Torah

In the Bible, names shed light on the text's meaning. Miriam's name contains two Hebrew words: *mar* ('bitter') and *yam* ('sea'). How do 'bitterness' and 'sea' feature in the Exodus story? (Hint: read on to v.23.) 'Miriam' is also derived from the Egyptian word *mer* ('beloved').

Our Torah portion refers to Miriam as prophet, yet gives no reason for the title, an omission which stirred the imaginations of the sages! One tradition holds that, in defiance of Pharaoh's death-wish for newborn Hebrew males, Miriam urged her parents to risk lovemaking and conception, having foreseen the birth of Moses and his role among the Hebrews.

Depthing Torah

What else is intriguing about our text? Notice how Miriam, and the women who follow her, bring out their tambourines ('hand-drums', 'timbrels'). What is odd about this? A people have just fled in haste, fearing for their lives, yet they packed musical instruments?! The *midrash* comments on this with an optimistic view of the faith of the Israelites: "The righteous ones were confident and knew that the One who is in every place would perform miracles and deeds of might as they came out of Egypt, and they were prepared with instruments and dances."¹

What else do we notice? Miriam's Song is recorded as one sole verse, a verse found in the preceding song led by Moses which lasts 18 verses. Do you find this puzzling? A body of scholarship suggests that the song led by Moses may in fact have been composed by a woman. In fact, one ancient manuscript calls it the Song of Miriam. This is in keeping with an ancient tradition of women hand-drummers going out to greet victorious troops returning home after battle.

Doing Torah

If there is ever a time for Christians to dance and sing in praise of God's saving power, Easter is it! Ponder this parallel: Miriam, the first individual in the Torah to be called 'prophet,' proclaims the saving work of God at the Red Sea. In the Gospels, another Miriam (Mary) is the first to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus at the empty tomb.



Halleluya! ('Praise the Lord!')

"During World Youth Day I was with a pilgrim group boarding a train to travel into the city. I was with a group of ten, but there were many more groups of youthful pilgrims getting on the same train. The atmosphere was joyful, but on this occasion not at all boisterous; rather subdued you might say. Maybe everyone was tired! Anyway, we were travelling along, and someone pulled out their guitar and began singing soft 'Alleluias'. A few more joined in, and before you knew it there were soft alleluias wafting through the whole train! At the time it seemed the most natural thing in the world. A train-full of people all praising the Lord!"