

Tenebrae Service of Shadows

Tenebrae is latin meaning darkness or shadows.

*The purpose of the service is to recreate the betrayal, abandonment, and agony of the events leading up to the death of Jesus on the cross, and it is left unfinished, because the story isn't over until Easter Day.

The Most Distinctive Part

The most distinctive aspect of the service is the use of a Tenebrae "hearse," a holder for several lit candles. The flames of these candles are extinguished one by one as Scripture readings are shared to tell the story of Holy Week. This gradual descent into gloom is a representation of Jesus' increasing sorrow as the events of Passion Week unfolded. As it gets darker and darker we can reflect on the great emotional and physical pain that was very real for Jesus that evening. After the last verse is read, the last candle is put out, and the room is plunged into darkness.

The Strepitus

Toward the end of the service, the Christ candle is hidden, typifying the apparent victory of the forces of evil over good, leaving the congregation in near total darkness.. At the very end, a loud noise is made, such as the violent closing of a book (called the strepitus), symbolizing the earthquake at the time of His death (Matthew 27) and His resurrection (Matthew 28:2) and to represent the closing of Christ's tomb. At this point, another lit candle, which has been hidden from view, is put at the top of the hearse, symbolizing Christ's resurrection.

Supplies

5 candles (4 for the shadows and one to be the Christ candle (in a holder))

Bible (flag passages: Mark 15, Luke 22 & 23, and John 19)

Device for listening to music

Optional: Large book for the strepitus

Order of Service (about 10-15 minutes)**

Introduction

Do you know what is happening right now in the church calendar? We are in the season of lent where we scrub our hearts to make them clean for Jesus. Today we are going to imagine walking with Jesus to the cross. We will be using candles that show us He is getting closer to death. I could use some help during the service to blow out one candle at a time. Will you help me? I also need your help with the readings. After we read a passage, I will say, "All respond" and you will say, "Ah, Holy Jesus." (optional to sing "Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom 2x). (Another option: I have set out _____ (coloring pages & colored pencils, yarn, blocks) for if your body needs to do something while we're reading.)

Before we start, let's do 10 jumping jacks (or alternate to get the wiggles out) then we'll take 5 deep breaths and sit down.

*Background Information: Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Yakima, Washington (<https://mountoliveyakima.org/>)

**Order of service adapted from: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

(<https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/tenebrae-a-service-of-shadows/>)

Tenebrae Service of Shadows

Opening

Light all 5 candles explaining that 4 represent the darkness and the one in the middle represents Jesus

Song: Trisagion by Fernando Ortega (2:30)

Shadow of Arrest

Reading: Luke 22:47-48, 52-54

All respond: Ah, Holy Jesus

Extinguish one candle from the outer edge (invite child to help)

Shadow of Crucifixion

Reading: Luke 23:33-38

All respond: Ah, Holy Jesus

Extinguish one candle on the other side also from the outer edge (invite child to help)

Shadow of Death

Reading: Mark 15:33-39

All respond: Ah, Holy Jesus

Extinguish one candle (invite child to help)

Christ Candle is removed

Shadow of Burial

Reading: John 19:38-42

All respond: Ah, Holy Jesus

Extinguish the last candle (invite child to help)

Silent Meditation

Optional: Strepitus (close a big book loudly symbolizing the earthquake and the closing of the tomb followed by a few seconds of silence)

Christ Candle is restored