

Tenebrae with Candles

What is Tenebrae?

The service of Tenebrae is celebrated during Holy Week, on Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday. While patterns may differ, the basic components are a series of readings on Christ's passion, along with lit candles that are extinguished, one at a time, following each reading. By the end of the service, the Passion narrative has been fully presented and the congregation is in darkness, as all the candles have been extinguished.

- Building Faith

Your family can journey through Holy Week together. Holy Week in a Box provides tactile and more "literal" symbols for Stations of the Cross which tell the story of the parts of Jesus' "passion" or suffering. In many churches,

Tenebrae candles are used to mark each part. Your family can create a Tenebrae candle holder with clay. You could share one part, reading a station each day of Holy Week, beginning on Palm Sunday, or you could go through all stations over the "Triduum", which is Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and

Holy Saturday. Many churches offer a Tenebrae service with all of the readings on Good Friday. At home, you could use the Tenebrae along with the Holy Week in a Box devotions, or with the Palm-Passion script with older children, reading a scene or two each day.

With younger children, we suggest spreading out the readings and story over the course of a week or a few days, as each part can prompt a lot of rich conversation or take some time to process, for both, children, and adults. Let your child guide their own readiness to discuss the big themes of the Paschal Mystery: sadness, power, injustice, betrayal, loss, injury, and yes, death and resurrection. Take your time and allow for wondering without needing to provide answers.

You can also simply arrange the votive candles on a plate or tray that you have at home to create your own Tenebrae with candles. A candle snuffer is useful, and you can make one with aluminum foil shaped in a small cone. Or just take the candles out to blow them out individually.

You can use any number of candles and readings that work with children's ages and your family's plan for observing Holy Week.

