

Teen Devotion

Year A – Third Sunday after Epiphany

Jesus Appears



One truth shared: Jesus comes into our darkest moments and brings the light of his truth and love.

When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God's instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,
the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.*

Isaiah 8:19-9:4

The Light in the Darkness

As unpleasant as it might be, think of a dark time in your life.

A time when you suffered. A time when you were confused or angry. A time when you lost hope.

Darkness has long been associated with these things. In the Bible, darkness not only refers to these things, but also to sin, unbelief, and death.

Read Isaiah 8:19-22 again.

It's not a pretty picture, is it? Isaiah describes zombie-like people who wander around in the darkness distressed, hungry, angry... and dead—dead inside.

It's a description of a people who look only to themselves and their own resources to solve their problems. Not finding answers, they become enraged with their leaders and with God. Then, they look one last time at their own abilities and resources. They find no ultimate answers or help and are thrown into utter hopelessness.

If we're honest with ourselves, we need to admit we're often like these zombie-like creatures. We think we can get along in life just fine without God. We've found other people or other information that seems more modern and logical than the God of the Bible.

And we don't think our sin problem is anything drastic, so we just try and deal with that ourselves, too.

Then, when problems come along in our lives, we get upset with anyone (especially God) besides ourselves.

However, here's the amazing thing about God. When we were at our worst... when we were angry, hopeless, and dead inside, he came to us.

Jesus came to this dark world and lit it up with peace, joy, and hope. Though our oppressors were great (sin, death, and the devil), he was greater. He defeated darkness on the cross.

Jesus still comes to us in our dark times. He speaks to us in his Word. He whispers peace into our hearts and shouts at our enemies to stay away.

What darkness in your life are you hiding from Jesus? Don't be shy or afraid. Go to him.

His light of truth and love will bring healing and hope.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank you for coming as a light into this dark world. Light up my own heart with your truth and love. Amen.

Foundation Teen Facilitators Guide

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The Light in the Darkness

Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

- What's the darkest place you've ever been (i.e., middle of forest at night, a basement, etc.)? How did it make you feel?
- Without sharing names or breaking confidence, discuss an encounter you may have had with someone experiencing darkness deep inside. What were they feeling?

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.*

Why do we often become so angry and hopeless during dark times in our lives?

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.*

- Read Isaiah 9:2. Explain these phrases from the verse:
 - "People walking in darkness"
 - "a great light"
 - "a light has dawned"
- What does it say about Jesus that he came to be with us during our darkest moment of unbelief and sin?

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the "connecting question" above.*

- If you ever feel like hiding some dark part of your life from Jesus, what can you remind yourself of?
- It can be difficult to know how best to show support to someone who is experiencing depression. Share as many things you can think of that you want them to know. Discuss things that are *not* helpful to say.