

THE WONDER OF EASTER!

During the Christmas season, it is easy to experience a sense of wonder at the cradle of the newborn baby Jesus. But wonder is not usually the feeling with which we approach Easter. We celebrate, yes, but after the long tumultuous march through Holy Week and grieving the loss of our Savior, we are relieved to be able to celebrate his Resurrection.

A Different Approach

But what if this year we pretend we are learning about the death and resurrection of Jesus for the very first time? What if our minds and hearts struggle to understand what Resurrection is for the first time? What if we came to the tomb expecting Jesus' broken body to be there, awaiting burial? We might discover that we approach the day much more like Mary Magdalene or Peter and John. We might be shocked to know Jesus is no longer in the tomb and dead. We might be confused about all the surrounding events. We might be in awe as Jesus appears to us in a new form. We might wonder at all the events of the past week. We might have many questions. We might have tears of relief, joy, disbelief, awe, and gratitude—all at the same time. We might not know what to do, or who to tell. We certainly would not know how to explain it all . . . but we would know Jesus is risen!

Imagine

The newly released movie, *The Young Messiah*, asks us to stretch our imaginations and wonder what Jesus would have been like as a seven-year-old boy about the time his family left Egypt to return home to Nazareth. There is no record of what Jesus was like as a boy, only that, "he was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him" (Luke 2:40). While the movie has many obvious problems and flaws, we can still take away from it the idea of reclaiming the sense of wonder and mystery at how God is at work in all things and in all people.



TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

The movie, *The Young Messiah*, is rated PG-13 for violence, so some younger teens may not see it. If you see the movie, look for the inconsistencies and know that the fictional portrayals are not based on Scripture. Instead, based on Anne Rice's 2005 novel, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, the film takes wild liberties while imagining what Jesus was like as a boy. For this lesson, focus on the Scriptures and the idea of meeting this Easter with fresh eyes and a youthful spirit to celebrate what God has done in the lives of your teens.

MEETING JESUS AGAIN— FOR THE FIRST TIME

Question of the Day: When are you most tempted to hide your faith?

Purpose: To help teens celebrate the work of the risen Lord in their lives.

Cultural Connection: Easter and the Movie, *The Young Messiah*

Topic: Seeing the Work of God

THE HEART OF A CHILD

Matthew 18:1-4

Then he called a little child over to sit among the disciples, and said, "I assure you that if you don't turn your lives around and become like this little child, you will definitely not enter the kingdom of heaven." —Matthew 18:2-3

Commentary:

The disciples wanted to know which of them Jesus liked the best and who would be assigned to the powerful roles in the new kingdom once Jesus was gone. But Jesus' solemn response warned them to turn away from their self-righteous thoughts and instead become humble, teachable, unassuming, curious, and obedient like the child he put before them.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ What is the difference between being childlike and childish?
- ▶ We all know what it feels like to want to grow up quickly. But what are some problems with learning too much too soon, or being given too much responsibility too soon?
- ▶ In the movie *The Young Messiah*, Mary and Joseph do not want to tell Jesus who he truly is; they believe God will reveal it in God's time. At age seven, what would have been the advantages and disadvantages of Jesus knowing his true identity?

MY LORD

Luke 9:18-27

He asked them, "And what about you? Who do you say that I am?" —Luke 9:20

"And Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'"

—Luke 18:16



Commentary:

There was much speculation about Jesus' true identity because word had spread of his healing miracles and teachings. Many believed he possessed an evil spirit and was some kind of sorcerer trying to fool people. Different groups were working to discredit Jesus' identity and power. Again, Jesus turned to his disciples and put the question back onto them. Peter responded from the heart, without thinking or hesitating, "The Christ sent from God" (verse 20b).

As we grow older, we may become more concerned with the historical Jesus or get distracted from growing in a relationship with Jesus. Regardless of our age or our knowledge or our place along the faith journey, we must always respond to that same question. Acknowledging who Jesus is in our lives offers us the possibility to follow the risen Lord each day.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ Why do you think Jesus asked this question of his closest friends? Do you think they had doubts? Do you have doubts?
- ▶ When are we most likely to forget about Jesus, or to stop working on our relationship with him? When are we most likely to cry out to Jesus and ask him to be with us?
- ▶ How do you answer Jesus' question today?
- ▶ How can we get to know Jesus in a more personal way?

WORK IN PROGRESS

Philippians 2:12-14

*For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. —Philippians 2:13 (NRSV)**

Commentary:

Paul wrote not only of the power of the Holy Spirit but also of the transforming power of God through Christ. He encouraged the church at Philippi to continue the work of God without him, knowing they too had the power of God inside them. Paul knew they faced temptations and had to deal with conflicts inside and outside of the church. But he was also confident in what God could do in each individual, and what God could do collectively through the church. If we are willing to look, we can see how God is at work in our individual lives and in the lives of others.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ How is God inside of us? How can God work in us? What are some other Scriptures that refer to this same idea?
- ▶ Why is it important for us to know that God is at work in all of us?
- ▶ Where do you see evidence of God at work in other people?



DEVOTION: IMPERFECT IS PERFECT

Too many of us get caught up in thinking that we should know more about the Bible, be better Christians, pray more, know more “theological answers” to questions, be more effective at witnessing our faith—and the list goes on. The truth is that God is still at work in us and, as long as we are still actively growing in discipleship, God is able to use our imperfections to help build God’s kingdom.

Read John’s account of the Resurrection in John 20:1-23. As you move through Holy Week and approach Easter, ask yourself: *Who is Jesus to you? How might you meet Jesus again—for the first time? What evidence will others see in you this week of how God is working through you? How can you point out how God is at work in others?* Remember that our imperfections are fertile ground for God to work in and through us. Be sure to pass that idea on to your teens this week.

*Scriptures abbreviated (NRSV) are from New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

NEXT WEEK: We swear we’re not making this up: National Tell a Lie Day is just around the corner! There’s a Truth Day, too, but not for another three weeks. Next week in LINC, we’ll talk about encouraging teens to reject the sometimes-convenient lie in favor of embracing truth.

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THE HUNT FOR JESUS

Getting Ready: You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, Bibles; 8 to 12 pieces of XXL or larger-size adult clothing (suits, dresses, hats, and shoes) that teens can easily slip on over their clothes; 3 or 4 very large spoons and bowls, small individual-size cereal boxes; 3 or 4 small (preschool) chairs; 1 plastic Easter egg per person with Philippians 2:13 written on as many slips of paper and tucked inside.

OPEN

Woo-hoo for Easter! (10 minutes)

Ask teens to pretend they are young children again (5 or 6 years old) and hearing the Easter story for the first time. Ask them to listen thoughtfully while you read (dramatically) the Resurrection story from Luke 24:1-12. Every time they hear you read the word *tomb*, they all should say “Woo-hoo!” Ask: “What happened in that story? Why are we happy today?”

Afterward, tell teens that teachers of young children often try to help them engage with a story by involving them in some way like you just did. Ask, “How does it feel to pretend to be young again and hear this story?” Use the information on Page 1 to draw teens into today’s lesson. Encourage them to share their playful spirit as they celebrate Easter.

EXPLORE

Talk Topic 1: Through the Eyes of a Child (15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Pull out the large clothes you collected earlier and ask three or four volunteers to come forward and dress up. Arrange the small chairs behind a table so that volunteers are facing the teens while sitting at the table. Give each volunteer a large bowl, a spoon, and a cereal box. Instruct

volunteers to open their boxes, pour the cereal into their bowls on the table, and eat the dry cereal using the spoons. Everything must stay on the table at table height; you may also want to raise the table if possible.

After a few minutes, thank the volunteers for their help, applaud their efforts, and allow them to slip off the “adult clothes” and rejoin the class. Ask the class:

- ▶ What was it like to see the volunteers in such big clothes?
- ▶ What did they look like behind the table trying to eat with such big spoons?

Ask the volunteers:

- ▶ What did it feel like to be in such big clothes?
- ▶ What was the hardest part of your task?
- ▶ What did it feel like to try to eat that way?

Again, thank your volunteers and then call on someone to read aloud Matthew 18:1-4. Use the commentary and lead a discussion around the questions in the Teacher Bible Prep.

High School Option

Use the Question of the Day to jump-start your discussion. Then say/ask: “If we keep our faith a secret, some would argue we have no faith at all. What do you think?” In the movie *The Young Messiah*, Mary and Joseph decide not to tell Jesus who he truly is because he is so young and because they believe God will reveal it to him in God’s time. What was good about that way of thinking? not so good?” Read aloud Matthew 18:1-4 with the group. Use the commentary and questions in the Teacher Bible Prep to continue your discussion.

BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

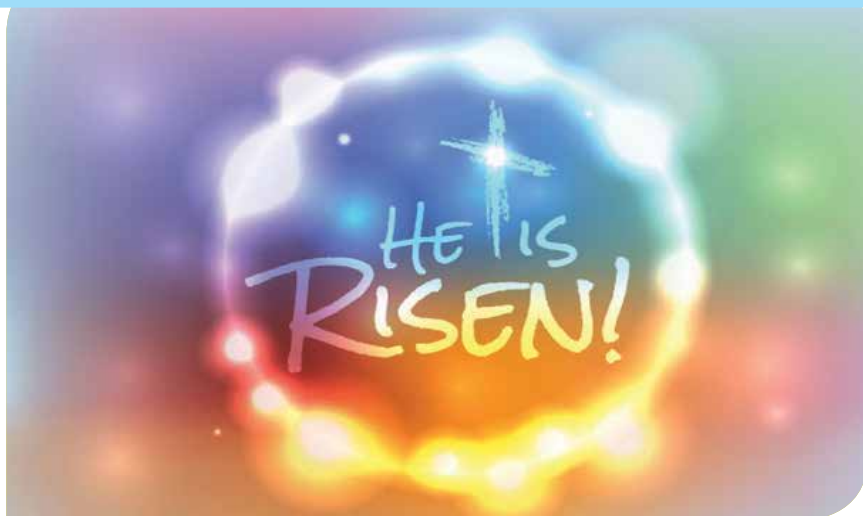
Buy and download the Skit Guys video, *Peter and John: The Empty Tomb*, or play a preview by going to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWUOM99P5i4>.

- ▶ How do the Skit Guys portray the kind of faith he was talking about in Matthew 18:1-4?
- ▶ How can you approach this day with that same kind of faith and joy?

One of two sites proposed as the place of Jesus’ burial.



THE HUNT FOR JESUS



Talk Topic 2: Who Is the Risen Jesus to You? (15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Invite teens to find a quiet spot where they can reflect and complete, “Who Do You Say That I Am?” on Youth Page 6. After several minutes, regroup and ask for volunteers to tell some of their responses. Mention that it is OK right now to have a lot more questions than answers about Jesus, his resurrection, and Jesus’ role in their lives. Ask teens to open their Bibles to Luke 9:18-27 and call on volunteers to read aloud the verses, a few at a time. Use the commentary and questions in the Teacher Bible Prep to continue your discussion.

High School Option

On the back of Youth Page 6 (or any piece of paper), ask teens to list as many facts as they can remember about Jesus. After a few minutes, ask teens to call out items from their lists and compare them to others’ responses. What was similar or different? Say: “We can learn a lot through the Scriptures about who Jesus is and what he taught. But that is not enough.” Ask, “What else are we supposed to do?” Continue your discussion with Luke 9:18-27 and the commentary and questions provided in the Teacher Bible Prep.

Talk Topic 3: Celebrate What God Is Doing in You Now (20 minutes)

Middle School Option

Ask teens to look at the “God’s Work in You” activity on Youth Page 6 and reflect on how God has been working in their lives since they were children. Give teens several minutes to work alone and encourage them to think of specific events or significant moments. Once most teens have finished, ask a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 2:12-14. Then call on teens to tell examples from what they wrote. Use the commentary and questions in the Teacher Bible Prep to continue your discussion. To close, gather in a circle, and

starting with yourself, mention one way you have observed God at work in the life of the person who stands to your right. (For example, “I see God at work in Charlie because of how he makes people feel better with his jokes and impressions.” Or, “I see God at work in Shonda because of how she tries to comfort friends when they are hurting.”) Continue around the circle until everyone has had a turn. Close in prayer thanking God for the gift of his Son Jesus and for the ultimate gift of Jesus’ resurrection and our salvation. As teens leave the session, hand out the Easter eggs you prepared earlier.

High School Option

Point out the “God’s Work in You” activity on Youth Page 6 and invite teens to work in pairs and reflect on and tell how they have seen God at work in their lives since they were children. Remind them to give one another equal time to share. Then ask teens to think about their partners and their gifts or talents. Invite partners to describe to one another how they see God working through the other person now.

After a few minutes, instruct pairs to turn in their Bibles and read aloud Philippians 2:12-14. List the questions from Teacher Bible Prep on a markerboard and ask pairs to talk about their answers. After a few more minutes, ask pairs to talk about their thoughts with the whole group. Ask, “What are some ways we can celebrate what God is doing through us?” Be sure to record everyone’s ideas and if there is something you can do immediately as a class, be sure to do it! If there is something you can do as a class that requires planning, allow some time for planning and follow-up. Close in prayer and as teens leave, hand out the Easter eggs you prepared earlier.

TAKE AWAY

From time to time, all of us feel (and act!) as if we are still children! Especially as Christians. But God does not expect us to have all the answers nor to be perfect. God *does* expect us to work each day at following Jesus with the humility and obedience of a child so that God may continue to work through us in powerful ways. Today, and every day, celebrate that you are risen with Christ into new life and look with awe at all God does in the world!

WORKING IT OUT

Take a few moments alone and reflect on what you know about Jesus. Next, imagine Jesus sitting across from you. How would you answer him if he asked you, “Who do you say that I am?” Be ready to answer the questions below:

▶ What is the difference between knowing things about a person and actually knowing him or her?

▶ How would you want someone to get to know you better?

▶ How can you get to know Jesus better?

It is OK if you feel like you don't know Jesus much at all. Knowing Jesus personally is part of your unique faith journey and you are not alone. You may have many questions about getting to know Jesus as Savior or risen Lord. Don't be afraid to ask those questions of an adult Sunday school teacher, youth leader, pastor, or other trusted adult.

God's Work in You

Beginning in the first box below, make notes about how God was at work in the different stages of growth of your life at different times. It is OK if you have felt distant from God at times, or if God has seemed quiet for periods in your life.

In the Bible: Readings for the Week

MONDAY: Read Matthew 18:1-5.

How will you continue to celebrate Easter with humility and joy all week?

TUESDAY: Read Isaiah 11:1-9.

How do you think God was at work in Jesus' life even while he was a child?

WEDNESDAY: Read Luke 9:23-27.

How are you taking up Jesus' cross daily?

THURSDAY: Read Romans 6:1-11.

Allow Jesus to take away your sins and have new life in him.

FRIDAY: Read Job 19:23-25.

God has been at work through eternity. Know that your Redeemer lives!

SATURDAY: Read Galatians 3:26.

Rejoice in the knowledge that you are a child of God!

“Who Do You Say That I Am?”



Inherit the Mirth



WHAT'S TRENDING?

What's your favorite Easter tradition? Tweet or post your with the hashtag #OnlyAtEaster on Twitter to @YMPartners or on facebook.com/youthministypartners