

A *tenebrae* service, or “service of shadows,” is a way of meditating upon the crucifixion. Beginning in the middle ages, the service was timed so that it was still light outside as people gathered. After singing some hymns, several candles were lit to represent Jesus’ last words while on the cross. As each passage was read, a candle was blown out. After the final candle, there would be a loud gong signifying Christ’s death, and people would exit in silence and into the darkness of night...

You can easily do this at home. Get a wooden spoon and a metal bowl or baking sheet to use for a “gong” (or find the sound online). At about dusk, turn off the lights in your home, and light 5 candles at your dinner table. Sing a song together as a family, then read a passage, blow out a candle, and observe a few minutes in silence before moving on to the next passage. After the final reading, let out the loud “gong” and sit a few more minutes in silence together. Close with a time of prayer.

Luke 23:32-34

“Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’”

Matthew 27:45-46

“About the sixth hour to the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ —which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”

John 19:28

“Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’”

John 19:30

“When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’”

Luke 23:45-46

“... the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.’ When he had said this, he breathed his last.”