

Emanuel Swedenborg: Servant of the Lord Three Incidents from His Life Overview

This lesson is designed to teach students basic biographical information about the life of Emanuel Swedenborg—1688-1772. Specific focus is given to three events in Swedenborg's life that demonstrate his ability to see into the spiritual world and to talk to people living there. These events are both true and well known.

It is suggested that teachers familiarize themselves with Emanuel Swedenborg's life by reading the Teacher Background biography of Emanuel Swedenborg that is included with this lesson. This brief account highlights a few central events and experiences in his life that are of interest for this lesson. For more complete information, the following biographies are readily available:

Swedenborg's Biography

<http://www.newchurch.org/about/swedenborg/biography.html>

About Emanuel Swedenborg

<http://www.swedenborg.com/AboutSwedenborg-BriefBio.asp>

Cyriel Odhner Sigstedt, *The Swedenborg Epic: The Life and Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* (New York: Bookman Associates 1952)

<http://www.swedenborgdigitallibrary.org/ES/epictc.htm>

Additional Resources used for developing this lesson:

R. L. Tafel, *Documents Concerning the Life and Character of Emanuel Swedenborg*, London, Swedenborg Society, 1890.

<http://swedenborgdigitallibrary.org/tafel/tafeltc.html>

J. O. Kuhl, *Emanuel Swedenborg: A Biography of His Life with Activities for the 4/5/6 Classroom*, Manuscript, 1996.

At-a-Glance

Teachers will share select highlights from Emanuel Swedenborg's life with students. It is suggested that emphasis is placed on three well-known incidents from later in his life that confirm his spiritual experiences: the Stockholm fire, the Queen's secret and the lost receipt. Students will act out and discuss one or more of these incidents.

Supplies Needed for Each Student

Play script(s)

Optional: costumes, props

Teacher Preparation

- Read brief biography containing highlights of Emanuel Swedenborg's life provided in the *Teacher Background* for this lesson.
- Highlight sections of special interest that you would like to share with the students.
- Choose one or more plays to act out, taking into account the number of students and time frame of your lesson.
- Print play script(s).
- *Optional: gather costumes and props. Present play to children or adults.*

Directions

1. Ask students: Who was Emanuel Swedenborg? Encourage students to share anything they know about his life.
2. Expand students' knowledge by sharing highlighted biographical information.
3. Today we will be acting out true incidents from Swedenborg's life.
4. Choose parts, distribute scripts and give students time to prepare. Encourage visualization of the setting and decisions about actions.
5. Students may either use scripts for book-in-hand theater; or assign one group of students to read while another group and acts act a plays.
6. Give 5-10 minutes to prepare scenes.
7. Students act out scenes.
8. Following each scene, ask students what the scene tells us about Emanuel Swedenborg. Draw out ideas such as: he met people who had died; he talked to people living in the spiritual world; he wanted to help people; he let us know that the spiritual world is a real place we will go to; he was not worried about what people thought of him.

Teacher Background

Emanuel Swedenborg 1688-1772—Brief Highlights

Emanuel Swedenborg was a remarkable man. He was born on January 29, 1688. During his early life his thirst for philosophical, scientific, practical and religious knowledge led him to study with learned professors. Twelve extensive European tours put him in touch with the foremost thinkers in Europe. Swedenborg applied this knowledge to finding practical solutions for a wide variety of problems. He invented many diverse things including an airtight stove, fire extinguisher, flying machine, hydraulic jack, submarine and ear trumpet. The King of Sweden recognized his genius and asked for his help to solve several problems which required his skills as a scientist, for example moving a fleet of ships overland.

Swedenborg's father, Jesper Swedberg, was a prominent Lutheran minister. He served King Charles XII of Sweden as a councilor and friend. He eventually became the Bishop of Skara, presiding in one of Sweden's most impressive cathedrals. After Charles' death Ulrica Eleonora, his sister, became Queen. She ennobled the Swedberg family, changing their family name to Swedenborg, in recognition of Bishop Swedberg's character and courage. As the eldest living son Emanuel was given a government position in the Swedish House of Nobles. He spent many years in service to his country, becoming well-known as a valuable member of the government. He accepted the position of Assessor of Mines and spent considerable time studying mining methods to improve mining in Sweden.

Religion played a central part in Swedenborg's life from the time he was born. Throughout his intensive years of study he actively studied the Word of God. At the same time he was researching and writing studies on mining methods in various European countries he became increasingly interested in the relationship between God and His creation—humankind. In an effort to understand the relationship between the human soul and body he studied anatomy, carefully examining the internal organs of the body. He published a book on the brain, which contributed to his reputation as one of the foremost scientists in Europe. Eventually he came to the conclusion that the scientific method could not reveal the soul: God alone could do this.

In 1744 Swedenborg asked for leave from his job so he could do research for a book he was writing about the kingdom of the soul. He had been having some unusual experiences for some time and had come to feel that the strange lights he was seeing were a sign that what he was writing was true. One night, while he was dining alone in Delft (Holland), he had a troubling vision. The same night, he experienced a vivid vision of the Lord in which the Lord told him that he wanted him to become His prophet. Swedenborg did not know what this would mean, but started devoting more time to studying the Biblical languages (Hebrew and Latin) and writing an index of the Bible. On April 6, 1745, a year after his first vision, the Lord appeared to him again in London. This time He promised to explain the meanings that lay hidden within the Scriptures, and told Swedenborg that he would share this message, and also tell people about life after death.

Swedenborg returned to Sweden and prepared to take on this work by retiring from working for the government. He renovated a small house in Stockholm and landscaped it with beautiful gardens, including a maze and a summer house. From the last twenty-six years of his life he put aside his own ambitions and worked and wrote tirelessly under the Lord's direction. Sometimes travels in the spiritual world would occupy him for days and he would come out of his bedroom only to write down his experiences. One day he experienced a magnificent vision of a temple with *Nunc Licet* written over the doorway ("Now it is permitted to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith"). The Lord told him that the temple was a vision of a new church that would be established on earth through the truths that were being revealed.

Following this vision, the world of spirits, heaven and hell were fully opened to Swedenborg. He spoke with people in the spiritual world daily, meeting friends who had died as well as many other people. He wrote many volumes explaining Scripture and the life after death. He published the books in Latin, the accepted language of his time, in London and Amsterdam. In July 1759 Swedenborg was staying in Goteborg (Sweden) when returning from one of his publishing trips. While he was having dinner with friends he became restless at 6 p.m. His friends asked what was troubling him and he told them that a fire was spreading rapidly through Stockholm (300 miles away) and that his home was in danger. Several hours later he rejoined the group, sharing the good news that the fire had stopped three houses from his own, which was spared. The following day the regional governor summoned him, asking for details about the fire. Swedenborg told him exactly how the fire had started, how long it lasted and how it was put out. Two days later a messenger arrived from Stockholm and verified everything he had said. From that time onwards people were amazed at his powers.

At first Swedenborg published the books anonymously because the truths they contained were from God. When people later found out who wrote them they reacted in a variety of ways. Some were amazed and anxious to read them; others were angry, or laughed. Sweden's Queen Louisa Ulrica was a skeptic who did not believe in life after death. During one of Swedenborg's visits to the palace she teasingly asked him if he could really talk to people who had died. When he answered "yes", she asked him to take a message to her brother, Prince Augustus William of Prussia, who had recently died. He agreed to it. Several weeks later Swedenborg came to visit and approached the queen as she was playing cards. Speaking privately to her, he told her something that had been a secret between the queen and her brother. She paled, and never made fun of him again.

An additional documented story of Swedenborg's ability to contact people after death centers on Mme. de Marteville, the widow of the Dutch Ambassador to Stockholm. Several years after her husband's death a goldsmith sent her a bill for an expensive silver tea set. Knowing that the bill had been paid in full but being unable to locate the receipt to prove it, she turned to Swedenborg for help. He contacted her deceased husband, who revealed where the receipt could be found.

Swedenborg did not always oblige when people asked him to carry messages between worlds. When a young man requested a visit with his recently deceased brother Swedenborg told him that his reasons for wanting contact were not sufficient and gave him a copy of *Apocalypse Revealed* instead.

In 1770 Swedenborg settled his affairs and left Sweden for the last time. His final work, *True Christian Religion* was completed in Holland in 1770. It ends with the following words:

After this work was finished, the Lord called together His twelve disciples who had followed him in the world; and the next day, He sent them forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ever and ever.

On March 29, 1772, six months after predicting the date of his own death, Swedenborg left his earthly life never to return. He left behind his completed mission—a new revelation of the Lord God Jesus Christ.

Fire in Stockholm

Adapted from *A Fire in Gothenburg* by Eunice Howard

Scene 1 Characters: Narrator, Swedenborg, Host, Hostess, Dinner Guests (flexible number)

Scene: Swedenborg is seated at a table eating dinner with his host and hostess and friends. Looking agitated, Swedenborg suddenly gets up from the table and begins to pace back and forth.

Narrator: Immanuel Kant, a famous German philosopher, described an incident that happened when Swedenborg was at a dinner party at the home of Mr. William Castel in the port of Goteborg in southern Sweden.

Guest: Mr. Swedenborg! You look as if you have just seen a ghost! What is wrong?

Swedenborg: I'm terribly sorry ladies and gentlemen, but a fire has just broken out in Stockholm, my home city. Some of my friends' houses have already burned to the ground and the fire is moving dangerously close towards my house. I'm very worried that I will lose my library and some important documents I'm working on. My manuscripts may all be lost! *He paces back and forth.*

Hostess: That is dreadful!

Host: What a disaster! But how can you possibly know this? Stockholm is 300 miles away!

Swedenborg: The Lord allows me to see things that other people cannot see.

Narrator: Swedenborg continued to pace for several hours as the dinner guests ate their meal. At around 8 p.m. he sat down at the table.

Hostess: How nice of you to join us again.

Host: What has happened in Stockholm?

Swedenborg: Thank God! My house was spared. The fire stopped just three houses away and has now been put out.

Scene 2 Characters: Narrator, Swedenborg, Governor, Messenger

Scene: *Swedenborg is visiting at the Governor's house.*

Narrator: The following day the governor asked Mr. Swedenborg to tell him whether the dinner guests had told him was true. Mr. Swedenborg repeated the details of where the fire had started, how it had spread, and how it was extinguished.

Governor: That's amazing! And you say the Lord allowed you to see all of that happening?

Swedenborg: Yes, Sir. I am His humble servant.

Narrator: Just then there was a knock at the door. A servant showed a messenger into the room.

Governor: Ah! Where have you come from? What has happened?

Messenger: I have come from Stockholm, Sir. There is terrible news. There has been a great fire and a third of the city has been destroyed in the south.

Governor: This is amazing! We have already heard this news—Mr. Swedenborg saw it all happening right here.

The Receipt

Adapted from *The Missing Receipt* by Eunice Howard

Scene 1 Characters: Narrator, Mr. Olsen (goldsmith), Madame de Marteville (a widow).

Set the scene: Madame de Marteville is entertaining her guest, Mr. Olsen. They are drinking a cup of tea together in her living room.

Narrator: Swedenborg was once able to help solve a mystery by carrying a message to someone who had died. The story starts when Madame de Marteville is entertaining Mr. Olsen, a goldsmith from Holland.

Mr. Olsen: Madame de Marteville—I see you are enjoying the use of the beautiful tea service I made.

Madame: Why yes! It's so beautifully made. It reminds me of my dear husband every time I use it.

Mr. Olsen: Ah yes. Speaking of your husband brings up a difficult matter. Your husband did not pay for the tea set. I was hoping that you might make that payment today.

Madame: Mercy! My husband always paid his bills promptly. I'm quite sure he paid for it before he died.

Mr. Olsen: Well then it should be an easy matter for you to show me the receipt. Produce the receipt, and I shall be quite satisfied.

Madame: I have looked for the receipt in every place I can imagine, and I am so sorry but I simply cannot find it.

Mr. Olsen: I'm sorry Madame. If you cannot produce the receipt I must insist that the silver belongs to me.

Madame: I simply can't! 25 000 Dutch guilders is a great deal of money. I am only a widow and really quite poor now.

Mr. Olsen: I insist that you pay me the full amount by the end of next week. If you do not I will come and take the tea set.

Narrator: Madame de Marteville was very upset and confided in her friend. Mrs. Bronsen knew Emanuel Swedenborg and suggested that he might be able to give her help.

Scene 2 Characters: Narrator, Madame de Marteville, Mr. Swedenborg, Guests.

Scene: Mr. Swedenborg has come to visit Madame de Marteville He enters her living room and takes a seat.

Narrator: Soon afterwards Mr. Swedenborg paid a visit to Madame de Marteville.

Swedenborg: Good-day Madam. I hear that you have a problem and need help

Madame: Yes, indeed Sir. I am so sorry to trouble you. I hear that you have an extraordinary gift and that you talk with the spirits of people who have died. I am unable to find the receipt for a valuable tea service. Might you have the kindness to ask my husband he put it for safe keeping?

Swedenborg: I am at your service Madame and will do everything I can to help you.

Madame: Oh thank you Sir. You are very kind.

Narrator: Three days later, Swedenborg returned to Madame de Marteville's house. She was entertaining guests.

Madame: Mr. Swedenborg, how nice of you to call.

Swedenborg: Good-day Madame! Good-day ladies and gentlemen.

Guests: Good-day, Mr. Swedenborg!

Swedenborg: Madame de Marteville, I have spoken with your husband in the spiritual world.

Guest 1: That's simply not possible! He departed this life some time ago.

Swedenborg: The Lord has granted me this ability. Madame, your husband said to let you know that he did indeed pay for the silver service seven months before he died.

Madame: What good news! I knew he had paid for it! But what proof is there?

Swedenborg: Your husband explained that he had hidden the receipt in the bureau over there.

Madame: But Sir, I have looked through every drawer. There is no receipt among the papers.

Swedenborg: Your husband mentioned a secret compartment that is behind the drawer on the left. You will find the receipt in the hidden compartment.

Madame de Marteville pulls out the drawer...

Madame: Why, there is a secret compartment! ...and here is the receipt. Mr. Swedenborg this is wonderful! Oh, how can I ever thank you?

Swedenborg: It is my pleasure to help you Madam.

Guest 2: This is a miracle! How did you do it?

Swedenborg: This is no miracle; it is the work of the Lord. He has solved this problem, not I.

Guest 1: How can we learn these things you have seen and done?

Swedenborg: They are revealed in the Heavenly Doctrine. The books I have written reveal precious truths about the life to come. They are from the Lord Himself.

The Queen's Secret

Scene 1 Characters: Narrator, Queen of Sweden, Count Scheffer, Swedenborg, Guests.

Scene: *The Royal Palace. The Queen is with some Guests. Swedenborg enters.*

Narrator: The Queen of Sweden received a letter asking about a man from Stockholm who could talk to the dead. The Queen asked the people who were with her whether such a person existed, and if so, whether he was insane. Count Scheffer, who knew Swedenborg, told the Queen that Swedenborg was a sensible and learned man and offered to introduce him to her.

Scheffer: Your Majesty, allow me to introduce Mr. Swedenborg—the man who talks with the dead.

Swedenborg: Your Majesty. *(Swedenborg bows to the Queen.)*

Queen: Why Mr. Swedenborg, is it true that you can talk to people who have died?

Swedenborg: Yes, your Majesty.

Queen: Could anybody learn to do this?

Swedenborg: No, it is a gift from the Lord.

Queen: Can you talk to anybody, or only to certain people?

Swedenborg: I talk to people I have known while they lived in the world. I also talk to famous people and the authors of books I have read.

Queen: Could you take a message to my brother who has died recently?

Swedenborg: With all my heart, Madam.

Narrator: Queen Louisa did not really believe in life after death. But she found it amusing to ask Swedenborg questions and to joke with her courtiers about his promise.

Scene 2 Characters: Queen, Count Scheffer, Swedenborg, Guests.

Scene: *The Royal Palace. The Queen is playing cards with some important guests. Swedenborg enters.*

Narrator: Three weeks later Count Scheffer and Mr. Swedenborg returned to the palace. They approached the Queen as she was playing cards with her guests.

Queen: Mr. Swedenborg! Do not forget my commission!

Swedenborg: It has already been done.

Narrator: The Queen left to speak privately with Mr. Swedenborg. They spoke so softly that nobody could hear what he said. The Queen was so startled when she heard him that she almost fainted in shock.

Queen: Mr. Swedenborg has brought a message from my brother. It was a secret known to nobody but my brother and I. No living person could have told this to him.

Narrator: The Queen never shared her secret. But from that time on she did not make fun of Swedenborg again.