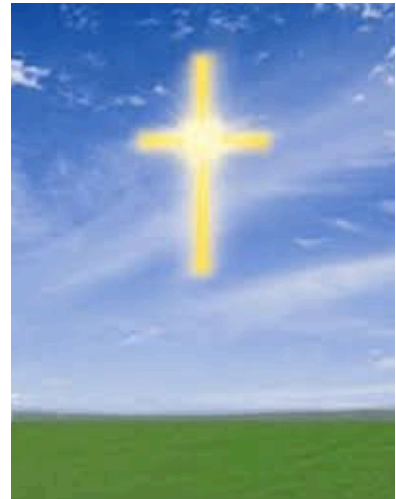


Dear Sunday School Leaders and Students,

Every day we see crosses all around us. People wear them as jewelry, they hang them on the wall, and they use them as key chains. When you pass by a church, it is not unusual to see a cross on the steeple. We even see many people who wear the cross as a tattoo on their body. What comes to your mind when you see a cross? What does the cross mean to you? Is it just a piece of jewelry or a work of art?



One day, as Jesus and his disciples were walking along a road, Jesus asked them, "Who do people say that I am?"

The disciples answered, "Some say John the Baptist or one of the prophets."

"And you - who do you say that I am?" Jesus replied.

Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Messiah."

Peter had given the right answer. You would think that would be the end of Jesus' lesson, but it wasn't. "Keep it quiet and don't breathe a word of it to anyone," Jesus said, "because it is necessary for me to suffer many terrible things. I will be arrested, tried, and killed, but after three days I will rise again."

Peter didn't like that! He took Jesus aside and told him to stop talking like that.

Jesus reprimanded Peter, "Get away from me, Satan! You are looking at things from a human point of view, not from God's."

Then Jesus called the crowd of people who had gathered around to come and join him and his disciples. "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."

So, what does it mean to us? It means that we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who was willing to give up everything so that we could have everlasting life. It also means that those of us who want to be his followers must also be willing to take up our cross, give up everything, and follow him.

The cross - it is so much more than a piece of jewelry, a work of art, or a decoration on a steeple. It is a reminder of our Savior's great love for us and our call to follow him!

Today we commemorate the Feast of the Apparition of the Holy Cross over Jerusalem.

This feast is dedicated to the Apparition of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem. At noon on May 19, 351, a bright, luminous cross appeared over the skies of Jerusalem, centered over an area spanning from the Mount of Olives (where Christ was betrayed and arrested) to Golgotha (where Christ was crucified). Awestruck, the faithful of Jerusalem rush to church to give thanks and glorify the Lord. Bishop Cyril (later St. Cyril of Jerusalem) subsequently wrote a letter to Emperor Constantine of Byzantium wherein he describes the miraculous and beautiful scene. St. Cyril tells Constantine that the apparition is a true testimony of the orthodox faith of Christianity.

Further, St. Cyril exhorts the Emperor that the appearance is a sign for him to remain steadfast in his faith, and to stop defending the heretical movement of Arianism and its promulgators. The Armenian translation of the Bishop's letter has been preserved by the Church, and is read each year on the Feast of the Apparition of the Holy Cross. The Armenian Church celebrates this feast 28 days following Easter Sunday.