



Swedenborg: Childhood 1688-1710

Lesson Overview

1. Watch a Video

Watch *Emanuel Swedenborg | Childhood* online at bit.ly/SwedenborgChildhood (11min 26sec)

2. Discuss

How did Swedenborg's childhood impact his life?

Erik Benzelius 1675-1743

Benzelius was a priest, theologian, librarian and Archbishop of Uppsala. A highly learned man, he was one of Sweden's most important Enlightenment figures. In 1702, he was appointed librarian at the University of Uppsala. He worked to expand the library's collection. He then studied to be a priest and was ordained in 1709. He kept in contact with botanists, mathematicians, historians and scientists from Europe. In 1703 he married Anna Svedberg, sister of Emanuel Swedenborg, and became Emanuel's benefactor. Benzelius published books about theology as well as the sciences. He was an active member of the Swedish parliament from 1723 until his death. He was described as being interested in anything that might benefit his country. He was elected as a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in 1740 and was its president in 1743,

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Discuss

Choose questions for discussion.

1. What industries were Emanuel's parents families involved with?
2. As an adult Emanuel became an Assessor at the Board of Mines. Which of his ancestors also held this position?
3. At the time of Emanuel's birth the Lutheran church forbade women to enter a church for forty days after giving birth. After forty days a mother would be "cleansed," and could then enter a church. (Mary was cleansed after Jesus was born; the Jewish faith maintains this tradition today.) This meant that Emanuel's mother could not attend his baptism. Why was being baptized more important than having the baby's mother at the ceremony?
4. The video shows the official record of Emanuel's birth from St. Jacob's church where he was baptized. What is the importance of documentary evidence? In what ways is seeing documentary evidence different from being told an event happened with no evidence?
5. Emanuel had six god-parents; three women and three men. The family chose these friends to share responsibility for Emanuel's spiritual welfare. In what ways might god-parents benefit a child? Children baptized into the New Church faith do not have god-parents. Why might this be?
6. As a priest, Emanuel's father, Jesper Swedberg, was among the most educated people of his day. How might this have affected his childhood?
7. What educational initiatives did Jesper Swedberg undertake? What might this tell us about Jesper's determination to educate his own children?
8. Emanuel spent the first years of his life in busy Stockholm. Compare his childhood experiences with your experiences. In what ways are your experiences similar? In what ways are they different?
9. Sweden was one of the last European countries to adopt Christianity, in 1130 AD. Ancient pagan beliefs lasted long after that—especially in Uppsala, the former pagan "capital" of Sweden. What pagan ideas (spirits and trolls) did Emanuel encounter as a child? How might these ideas have impacted his ability to embrace ideas about the spiritual world and its relationship to the natu-

10. What beliefs prompted Emanuel's family to sleep in beds of straw on the floor at Christmas?
11. Compare the Swedbergs' Christmas preparations with your family's Christmas planning. How does your family "make room for the Christ child?"
12. Compare Jesper Swedberg's idea of faith (returning God's gift of life by doing what is right) with New Church ideas about faith.
13. Emanuel's life changed at age eight when his mother and older brother died. In time, his father married a wealthy widow. How did these events alter Emanuel's future?
14. After Sara's death Jesper Swedberg hired Johannes Moraeus, Sara's cousin, to tutor his children. He was a brilliant man and eventually became a doctor. Emanuel learned well under him. How has a great teacher helped you?
15. What personal problem may have affected Emanuel's choice to become a scientist instead of a minister?
16. Emanuel was the youngest student to moderate debates at Uppsala University. Teachers discussed whether or not to let him do it because he was so young! What does this tell us about how others saw him as a teen?
17. At nineteen Emanuel had finished university and set off to continue his education abroad. Compare this with your own expectations for life at nineteen.
18. In 1688, 93% of Swedes were farmers with little or no education. In providence, Emanuel was born into a family who could give him an education and financial security—so that eventually he could serve the Lord. What opportunities do you have as a result of your birth and family situation?

Emanuel Swedenborg | Childhood

Visitors to the cathedral of Uppsala, Sweden, may see Emanuel Swedenborg's sarcophagus. In 1910, when his remains were brought from England (where he died) to be re-interred, Gustav V, King of Sweden, paid him national tribute. Few Swedes have earned this honor.

Emanuel was endowed with multiple gifts which determined the course and quality of his life. His mother's relatives were prominent in the mining industry; his father was a clergyman of intelligence and zeal. Emanuel was born on the 29th of January 1688, into a household where the secular and the sacred were well blended. Though his mother, Sara Behm, died when he was eight, her quiet, benevolent spirit molded his character.

His father, professor of theology at the University of Uppsala and Dean of the cathedral, later became Bishop of Skara and was elevated to the rank of nobleman by Queen Ulrike Eleonora. One result of this was the change of the family name from Swedberg to Swedenborg. The Bishop also served as chaplain to the royal family and had access to the highest social and political circles of Sweden. From birth Swedenborg experienced a pious family atmosphere. His family discussed religion, and he exchanged ideas on faith and life with many clergymen. Years later he wrote: "I was constantly engaged in thought upon God, salvation, and the spiritual sufferings of men...."

Politics, war, philosophy, & technology undoubtedly entered family discussion as well. He showed high intellectual promise and in June, 1699 was enrolled at Uppsala University. The university offered four fields of study: theology, law, medicine and philosophy. Although Swedenborg studied philosophy, taking courses in science and mathematics; he also took courses in law, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. For fun he wrote poetry in Latin and studied music. He became accomplished enough on the organ to fill in for the regular accompanist at his church. See Swedenborgstudy.com

Pagan Uppsala

Uppsala was an important religious, economic and political center in Sweden from the 3rd century AD. During pre-history, Gamla Uppsala, a parish and a village outside Uppsala, was known in Northern Europe as the residence of the Swedish kings of the Yngling dynasty. During the Middle Ages, it was the largest village of Uppland. The eastern part of it belonged to the Swedish Crown. Uppsala was also the location of the *Thing of all Swedes*, a general assembly, held from pre-historic times to the Middle Ages in conjunction with a great fair and a Norse religious celebration (*Dísablót*). At this assembly the king would proclaim who would be conscripted for warfare, and the crews, rowers, commanders and ships would be decided.

Adam of Bremen (d. 1081) described a pagan Temple at Uppsala. "[The] magnificent temple...is not far from the city of Sigtuna. In this temple, built entirely of gold, the people worship the statues of three gods....A festival for all the provinces of Sweden is held every nine years. Participation is required of everyone." Human and animal sacrifice were part of the ritual.

When Pope John Paul II visited Scandinavia in 1989, he held an open-air mass at the royal mounds in Gamla Uppsala, as this was a Norse religion cultic center, which became Sweden's first archbishopric in 1164. See Wikipedia.org