The Raising of Lazarus

A lesson plan for Orthodox children from PreK to Grade 3
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## LESSON MATERIAL

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Objectives

Children should be able to briefly retell the story of Lazarus.

Lazarus was a good friend of Jesus’ who became very sick and died. Lazarus had already been dead for four days when Christ raised him.

Children should recognize Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

They were siblings and Jesus’ good friends.

Older children should understand why this miracle is important to us today.

It reveals Christ’s dominion over death, thus reminding us of the potential for our own salvation if we choose to follow Him.

BACKGROUND

The Raising of Lazarus is the most important miracle that our Lord Jesus Christ performed, just before He entered His Holy Passion. It is a great feast day of the Church, and is celebrated the Saturday before Palm Sunday (thus the name Lazarus Saturday), right before the beginning of Holy Week.

The importance of the Raising of Lazarus can be summarized as follows:

• By raising Lazarus, Jesus Christ appears as Lord and Victor over Death.
• The miracle is a prophecy in the form of an action – it foreshadows the Resurrection of our Lord, which happened eight days later and, by extension, our own resurrection on the Last Day.
• This miracle clearly reveals the two natures of Christ, human and divine. Jesus simultaneously displays human emotions, weeping for His friend, and the fullness of His divine power, raising Lazarus’ dead and already decomposing body.

Also noteworthy

• Because of the Raising of Lazarus, Christ was recognized by the masses as the long-anticipated Messiah King of Israel. This further enraged the Pharisees against our Lord, and from that moment on they planned to put Him to death – and to also kill Lazarus.
• Lazarus’ bodily corruption symbolizes the corruption happening to our soul because of our sins.

EXPLORE FURTHER

• The Orthodox Study Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishing Company, pages 1446-1448.
• GOArch online article on the Raising of Lazarus and Palm Sunday.
• OCA online article on Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday.
• Ancient Faith podcast by Fr. Thomas Hopko on Lazarus Saturday.
Christ stands in the center, with His right hand raised, calling forth Lazarus. Lazarus is shown standing in the tomb entrance, still wrapped up in his burial clothes. Mary and Martha are kneeling in front of Christ and weeping. On the right side of the icon, we see one or two young men rolling away the tombstone, and, in some variations of the icon, starting to unbind Lazarus. On the left side of the icon, the disciples stand behind Christ, looking fearful as well as doubtful.

In the background we see the walls of the town of Bethany from where the Jewish people have come out to the tomb site to mourn Lazarus. Some of them have raised their garment in front of their nose to indicate the odor coming out of the four-day-dead body of Lazarus.

Icon by Athanasios Clark, www.tomclarkicons.com Courtesy of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Department of Religious Education.
The Death of Lazarus

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. 3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4 But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.” 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7 Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go into Judea again.” 8 The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?” 9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. 10 But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” 11 Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep.” 12 The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.” 13 Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. 14 Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead; 15 and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 16 Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

17 Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. 21 Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” 27 She said to him, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.”

Jesus Weeps

28 When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29 And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out,
they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; 34 and he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35 Jesus wept. 36 So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. 39 Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. 42 I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me.” 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

The Plot to Kill Jesus

45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him.
General guidelines

When using the Bible Reader, we have found it more engaging to retell the story in an animated way, and in our own words, while showing the pictures from the book, instead of reading it. Of course, in this case, the teacher’s familiarity with all the main points is presumed.

However, in our day and age, when children are constantly bombarded with very stimulating visual information, just using a book, especially one including Byzantine-style illustrations — a painting tradition not easily understood by youth — might not be the most effective way to attract the children’s attention. In fact, we have seen our students’ participation greatly increase when we tried to initially present the story in more visually engaging ways, with Byzantine iconography presented as a second step. We have also found that the children immediately tune into anything presented on a computer screen, and we have been trying to take advantage of this fact. In this light, some ideas for story introduction are listed in this section.

We frequently use paper puppets that we make for this purpose and which are included in the following pages. Even if not chosen by the teacher to introduce the story, they can be used by the children for role-playing, after the story has been presented.

*It should be noted that there is no financial gain for us from any of the external links that we provide in our lesson plans. We have been finding this external material very useful ourselves, and we are only including it to share our experience, as we feel it could also be helpful to others.*
Free storytelling images
some preparation required

We have found two free visual storytelling resources available online.

- **Lambsongs**
  These are cute cartoon-style illustrations that can appeal to young children.

- **Free Bible images**
  These illustrations are more realistic-looking, thus they can better appeal to the older age groups.

**Some ideas for using the images from these resources:**

- Print out (and laminate, if you wish). Use the images — not the text, wherever text is provided — to tell the story in an Orthodox way. You can even cut the text off entirely. You can then have the children retell the story using the images. You can also mix the images up and have the children put them back into the correct order.
- Use the images to make a Powerpoint presentation, which you can present as a slide show on your computer when relating the story.

Icon - inspired paper puppets
some preparation required

Cut out the characters and props you will find in the following pages. You can either laminate them or glue them on card stock for sturdiness. Use the puppets to tell the story in your own words. Once you introduce the story, you can then have the children act it out using the puppets.

The paper puppets can also be used on a magnetic board, by sticking self-adhesive magnet pieces on the back. Another option would be to tape craft sticks or drinking straws on the back, for holding and moving the puppets around more easily.
General guidelines

On every lesson, we print out a colored copy of the relevant icon, laminate it and place it in the classroom icon corner. The children first notice this icon at prayer time, at the beginning of class, and they eventually figure out that it changes each Sunday.

We have found the icon of the day to be a powerful teaching tool so, after discussing the story, we always work on the icon. We remove it from the icon corner and describe it, then the children do activities on copies of the icon, in a way that depends on their age group. Instructions for doing this are included in this page. Working on the icon helps to both reinforce the story and familiarize the children with the theological aspects of Orthodox iconography, gradually increasing their appreciation for this art.

We also use the icon of the day as a review tool. At the beginning of the storytelling session of the following class, before we move into the theme for that day, we present the icon of the previous lesson, asking the students review questions. We are often impressed with what they remember.

ICON WORK

**Younger children**
PreK-Kindergarten

Print out the icon found on page 14, one copy for each child, in black and white. Provide colored pencils or crayons. On their copies, and using the laminated class icon as a guide, have the children find and circle in different colors the following:
- Christ
- Mary and Martha
- Lazarus
- The tombstone
You can also ask them to find and color Lazarus’ burial cloth or any other details you want them to notice in the icon. At the end, they can color the whole icon if they wish and time allows.

**Older children**
Grades 1-3

Use the icon worksheet found on page 15. Once the students have completed their work, they can color the icon if they wish and time allows.

*The color icon in the following page is provided for this purpose.*
Icon by Athanasios Clark, [www.tomclarkicons.com](http://www.tomclarkicons.com). Courtesy of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Department of Religious Education.
Find the people in the icon and write the correct number on the appropriate line.

Christ ............... Lazarus ............... Lazarus' sisters ...............  
Christ's disciples ............... People watching ...............
Some children finish working on their icon earlier than others. This is why we always have a fun worksheet available that reinforces the main points of the lesson. Such worksheets can be found in the following two pages. If not used in class, they can be offered as take-aways to be completed at home.
Help Jesus find the way to Lazarus' tomb.
THE RAISING OF LAZARUS - WORD PUZZLE

Use the code to find out what Jesus said to Lazarus.
General guidelines

We always finish with a fun activity (a craft, a game or both), which we consider an integral part of the lesson. Having a good time with their friends in Sunday School increases the children's desire to attend, and at the same time helps them associate Church with pleasant feelings of fellowship and community. Sometimes the snack we offer is also related to the theme of the day in a fun way, or introduces the children to a relevant tradition. Various ideas for fun activities and snacks are listed in the following pages.

Most crafts are generally very versatile and use a variety of materials, most of which can be found around the house or can be purchased at any art supply store at a low cost. We strongly advise to make at least one sample at home beforehand, so you can roughly estimate the time needed for the students to complete the same craft in the classroom.
Craft stick or plastic spoon Lazarus

The basic idea for this craft is to wrap a “body” in strips by some kind of white material. You can decorate your Lazarus further with googly eyes, a smile cut from colored paper or pipe cleaner hands.

Inspired by an idea from the blog Crafts by Amanda.

**Materials**
- Jumbo craft sticks or plastic spoons
- White felt or self-adhesive athletic tape or white yarn
- Googly eyes
- Optional: Colored construction paper, colored yarn (for hair and/or beard), white pipe cleaners
- Glue

**EXAMPLES**

Wrap a plastic spoon in strips of white felt. Decorate with pipe cleaner hands, googly eyes, and a red paper smile.
Wrap a craft stick in felt strips and decorate with googly eyes.

Wrap a craft stick in self-adhesive sports tape and decorate with googly eyes.

Wrap a craft stick in white yarn and decorate with googly eyes.

If you wish, you can further decorate any of the above variations with pipe cleaner hands, or a brown paper beard and a red paper smile.

For this craft you can use the Lazarus puppet images found in the following page. Print, laminate and cut out the Lazarus copies. Punch several holes around Lazarus' body. Have the children pass a piece of white shoe lace (or yarn, ribbon, etc.) back and forth through the holes.

Idea adapted by permission from the blog Totschooling.
Pipe cleaner Lazarus

Materials
Pipe cleaners
White yarn
Googly eyes
Glue

Make a human figure out of a pipe cleaner following the directions below. Then wrap it in white yarn and glue on a pair of googly eyes.

HOW TO MAKE A PIPE CLEANER MAN

1. Fold the pipe cleaner in half. To make the head, wrap the two pieces around each other a few times, about one inch below the fold.
2. Fold up each hanging part of the pipe cleaner as shown to start making the hands.
3. Fold each unfolded part of the pipe cleaner over each shoulder and down.
4. Wrap the two parts of the pipe cleaner around each other a few times to complete the torso and legs.
**Paper cup tomb and craft stick Lazarus**

**Materials**
- Dark-colored paper cups
- Small craft sticks
- Gauze or white yarn
- Googly eyes
- Brads
- Glue

**Tomb**
Starting from the rim of the cup, cut off a semicircular piece for the tomb door. Punch a hole above the door opening and a hole in the top part of the door itself. Connect the door to the cup with a brad.

**Lazarus**
Wrap a strip of gauze or white yarn around a small craft stick and glue on two googly eyes.

**Activity idea**
Stand the cup on the table with the door facing down. Open the door and put Lazarus inside the tomb, then close the door. Ask the children to tell you the phrase Jesus used to raise Lazarus (“Lazarus, come forth!”). When the children say the phrase correctly, open the door to reveal the resurrected Lazarus. The children can then be separated in pairs and take turns doing the same, using their own paper cup tomb and Lazarus.
Materials

* Pink or brown construction paper or card stock, masking tape, googly eyes, markers, glue
* Optional: Colored yarn (for hair and/or beard)

Draw a man shape on a piece of colored paper. For hair, tape a curled piece of colored yarn on top of the head with a piece of white masking tape. Cut more pieces of masking tape and stick them across the body. Cut the body out after you have finished sticking the pieces of tape. Decorate as you wish — with googly or drawn eyes, a smile on the face, or a yarn beard and a paper smile.

Adapted by permission from a post on the blog [No Time for Flash Cards](https://notimeforflashcards.com).
Salt dough Lazarakia

On Lazarus Saturday, it is a tradition in Greece and Cyprus to bake *Lazarakia* — small, sweet bread rolls shaped in the form of Lazarus wrapped up in his burial clothes. We were inspired to turn *Lazarakia* into a craft, using salt dough instead of the real dough. A good link about *Lazarakia*, that also includes some folk songs sung by children on Lazarus Saturday, can be found at the web site [Living Orthodox Traditions](#). A recipe for real *Lazarakia* is provided in the **Snacks** section of our lesson plan.

**How to form Lazarakia:** Shape an egg-sized amount of dough into an oblong. For the hands, form two little ropes of dough and place them in an x-shape on the middle of the oblong. Form a third little rope into a circle and place it on top for the head. Stick two cloves in the middle of the head for eyes.

**SALT DOUGH RECIPE**

- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup water
- 2 cups white flour

Mix all ingredients together well, adding a little more flour if necessary, to make a dough with the consistency of play dough. Salt dough creations can be baked in a 200° F oven for about an hour to harden. When using salt dough in Sunday School, the creations can be left to air dry until the following week.
GAME IDEAS

Dead man wrap-up game

Materials
White paper streamers (found at party supply stores)

Separate the children into teams. The children pretend to be anonymous deceased persons being prepared for burial. They will be “raised from the dead”, like Lazarus, during the course of the game.

Version 1
Choose one child in each team to be the dead man. Hand one streamer roll to each team. The children of the team have to wrap the dead man entirely up in strips of paper. When every dead man is wrapped up, the teacher says GO. The first team to unwrap their dead man is the winner.

Version 2
Another variation of the game can be played relay-race-style. The teams stand in a straight line. The first person in line gets a paper streamer roll. When the teacher says GO, the person in front wraps the paper strip a few times around him/herself and then passes it on to the next person, for them to do the same. The paper streamer roll has to go all the way down the line and back up again until it is all used up. Then each person of the team, in sequence, must break free from the wrappings. The first team to complete the task is the winner.

Adapted by permission from a post on the blog Orthodox Education.
SNACK IDEAS

Lazarakia bread rolls

- 2 lbs unbleached, all purpose flour
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- 1 cup cane sugar
- 1 tablespoon (2 packets) active dry yeast
- 1-1/2 cup lukewarm water
- 1 teaspoon orange peel, one teaspoon cinnamon or a combination of both
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line baking sheets with parchment paper. Mix all the dough ingredients and then knead until the batter becomes a nice soft dough. Cover and let it rest for about 15 minutes in a warm place. Take a piece of dough (about 2 tablespoons), knead it into a ball and shape it into an oblong. Take 3 small pieces of dough and shape them into two crossed hands and a headband. Stick 2 whole cloves to make the eyes. For detailed instructions on forming Lazarakia, see the salt dough Lazarakia directions in the Crafts section of our lesson plan. Let the Lazarakia rise until doubled in size, about 1 hour. Bake for 30-40 minutes, or until the bread rolls turn golden-brown.
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