We stand in awe as Jesus raises Lazarus from death.

- Jesus travels to Bethany where he comforts his friends Mary and Martha by raising their brother Lazarus from the dead.
- Young children are not immune from human fears about death and the end of life. We can acknowledge their feelings even as we affirm God’s life-giving power over every fear.
- Today’s session explores the gospel story together with the season of Lent.

Question of the Week
What do you still hope Jesus can do, even if it seems impossible?
**Getting Started** (5-15 minutes)

Invite children to make play-dough figures to use in today’s story.

Put out play dough (see the recipe p. 3), Model Magic or other modeling material. Invite children to explore the material freely. They can squeeze, poke and shape. Invite volunteers to make play-dough people to help tell today’s story. You will need at least four figures to represent Mary, Martha, Lazarus and Jesus. Any extra figures can be the other friends of Jesus. If no one volunteers, make the figures yourself.

Several children could also make a play-dough tomb by following these directions:
- Turn a bowl upside down.
- Cover the outside of the bowl with play dough.
- Stick tiny pebbles in the play dough to make a stone cave; this will be the tomb.

**Gospel Story** (5-10 minutes)

**Lazarus, Come Out!**

*Story Focus: Use the play-dough figures made in today’s Getting Started activity.*

This is Lazarus. *(Touch each figure as you name it.)* This is his sister Martha and his sister Mary. They were all special friends of Jesus. *(Put Lazarus, Martha and Mary in one place and Jesus in another.)*

One day Lazarus died. *(Lay Lazarus in the tomb.)* Mary and Martha cried. They couldn’t sleep. They missed their brother.

When Jesus heard, he was sad, too. “We must go to Mary and Martha’s house,” said Jesus to his other friends. “Lazarus has died, but God will give him new life.”

Jesus and his friends walked to Mary and Martha’s house. *(Move the figures to Mary and Martha.)* Martha met him and said, “Jesus, if you had been here, Lazarus wouldn’t have died.”

“Your brother will have new life,” said Jesus. “Believe in me.”

Martha said, “I do believe in you, Jesus.”

When Mary saw Jesus, she began to cry, and so did Jesus. Jesus prayed to God. “God, show what your power can do.”

Then Jesus said, “Lazarus, come out.” *(Silently bring Lazarus out of the tomb.)*

Martha and Mary saw Lazarus alive. I wonder what they said. I wonder what they did. I wonder what you feel when you listen to this story.

**Art Response** (5-15 minutes)

Lazarus

Invite children to draw today’s story. Some children may want to describe what they have drawn to you or to the other children. Other children prefer to draw without explanation. Try to accommodate both preferences.

As an alternative, allow time for the children to respond to the story with talk and play. They may have feelings to share, or they may want to move the story figures. Make the story figures and tomb available in a free-play center for the children. Allow one or two children at a time to visit this center.

**Praying Together** (5 minutes)

Sit in a circle with the children. Say:
- I wonder what Martha and Mary said when Jesus made Lazarus alive again.
- I wonder what you would like to say to Jesus this morning. *(Allow time for the children to talk freely to Jesus.)*

Close by praying:
- Thank you, Jesus, for loving Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Thank you for loving *(name each child in the group).* Amen.

**Note:** If you use *At Home with the Good News*, distribute this week’s paper to the children before they leave, or e-mail it to their parents after the session.
Discover the Good News (5-10 minutes)

In today’s Discover the Good News you’ll find a simple version of today’s gospel story.

You will also find a maze based on the gospel story. You can invite the children to work together to find the path that Mary and Martha can use to run to their brother Lazarus.

Singing Together (5-10 minutes)

From Singing the Good News, sing together:
◆ “Come Out, Lazarus” (p. 37 of the songbook)
◆ “You Shall Live” (p. 38 of the songbook)

Note: To access both the songbook and its attached MP3 files, open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Singing the Good News.

Play Dough Recipe

Commercial modeling materials for young children work fine, but you can make your own, too.

Mix together 1½ cups flour, ½ cup salt, ½ cup water and ¼ cup oil. Knead well. If desired, use food coloring to tint the play dough. Store in plastic containers.

Story-Review Game

Travel to Lazarus

In this game, children pretend to be Jesus, calling Lazarus out of his tomb.

Begin by taping the painting Mountain, Cloud and Sea, attached to this document, at one end of the room.

Gather children around the painting. Explain that Mary, Martha and Lazarus all lived in a town called Bethany. Their home was on the bottom of a mountain—not a big mountain, like the one in the picture, but a small mountain.

Invite children to choose a place on the poster where Mary, Martha and Lazarus might have lived. Place the tomb—with the story figure of Lazarus inside—in plain view.

Put a strip of masking tape at the other end of the room. Line up the children behind the tape.

Stand near the tomb and say:
◆ Lazarus is in the tomb.

◆ When I call your name, you will be the next Jesus. I will tell you a way to travel to Lazarus.
◆ When you reach Lazarus, you can call him out of the tomb.

Give each child a different motion for traveling, such as hopping, jumping, running, walking, etc. (Most young children can’t skip.) Call one child at a time by saying:
◆ (Name of child), you are Jesus; run (or walk, hop, jump, etc.) to Lazarus.

When the child reaches Lazarus, he can make up his own words to say to Lazarus; for example:
◆ Come out, Lazarus.

Let the child take “Lazarus” out from the tomb. This child can then call the next child to be Jesus. Continue until all the children have had a chance to travel and to call out Lazarus.

Story-Review Game

Call Lazarus

In this movement game, the children use their bodies to form a tomb that opens to let out Lazarus.

Teach the song and chant below:
◆ Sing the first four lines to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell.”
◆ Chant the remaining three lines, emphasizing each syllable printed in boldface.

Lazarus in the tomb,
Lazarus in the tomb,
Je-sus, call out our friend,
Lazarus in the tomb.

Laz-a-rus, Laz-a-rus,
Come on out.

When the children know the song and chant well, ask one child to be Lazarus and one child to be Jesus. Help Lazarus crouch on the floor; invite the other children to hold hands, tightly encapsulating Lazarus.

Sing the song together, asking Jesus to chant the last lines alone. When Jesus calls, have the children let go of their hands to let Lazarus out. Repeat the game several times, with other children as Lazarus and Jesus.

Lenten Review (10-20 minutes)

Children explore materials used of Lenten worship in a Lenten center. They also review an action rhyme learned in the session for the 1st Sunday of Lent.
Make crosses and purple Lenten cloths (vestments, napkins or ribbons) available for the children's exploration. Say:

◆ This is the season of Lent. Lent is a time we pay special attention to the cross of Jesus. (Show children the various crosses. Hold one in your hand.)

◆ Jesus died on a cross.

◆ Then Jesus did a wonderful thing. He became alive again! (Hold the cross as you stretch your arms in a sign of victory.)

Lay the cross in the center of the circle. Stay in a circle as you stand together. Recite this action rhyme with the children. Speak slowly:

I stand here straight and tall.
(Stand, arms stretched straight over head.)

I open my arms to all.
(Slowly lower arms to cross position.)

I make a cross, as Jesus did,
(Stand with arms outstretched in cross shape.)

For people big and small.
(Keep cross shape as you rise up on tiptoes, then bend knees to stoop.)

On a cross our Jesus died.
(Cross arms over chest.)

But now our Jesus is alive.
(Stand straight, arms stretched wide and overhead.)

I make a cross, with you and you;
(Lower arms to cross shape.)

Jesus loves us. We love, too!
(Join hands with neighbors.)

Young Children and the Gospel

Today's gospel foreshadows the miracle of Easter as Jesus calls Lazarus back to life from death. This story, even with its ending of new life for Lazarus, is both frightening and mysterious for many young children.

How will you answer such questions from the children as, “Will I die someday? Will Daddy? What will happen to me when I die? Why doesn’t Jesus make my dog alive again? Why did my grandmother die?”

Some guidelines for answering children's questions, about death or any difficult subjects, are:

◆ Do not assume that you must give a definitive answer to every question. Invite children to explore their own understanding by asking, “What do you think?”

◆ Be willing to say, “I don’t know,” when you do not know.

◆ Begin your sentences with such phrases as “I think...” when you are sharing your opinion or “I believe...” when you are sharing your faith.

Some possible answers to consider are:

◆ I believe that after we die, we go to live forever with God. (Assure each child individually, if you can, that he or she will go to be with God.)

◆ I believe that people who die before us—our family or our friends—go to be with God, too.

INFO Where You’ll Find Everything Else

◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
  — Backgrounds and reflections for today’s readings, titled More about Today’s Scriptures.
  — A printable version of today’s Gospel Story: Lazarus, Come Out, to use in the session or to send home with—or e-mail to—children and their parents.
  — An article titled Book Talk, which contains suggestions for children’s picture books to help children understand and cope with the experience of loss.
  — For catechists, a copy of the Special Needs Bibliography, excerpted from our special-needs resource, Rhythms of Grace.
  — Hubbell’s Mountain, Cloud and Sea, to be used in today’s Story-Review Game.

◆ Open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on Seasonal Articles to find:
  — Information on Spring-A’s Models of the Faith.
  — An article for catechists and/or families delving more deeply into The Gospel of John.
  — A helpful Holy Week Overview, suitable for families as well as catechists.
  — The Introduction for Preschool/Kindergarten for Living the Good News.
More about Today’s Scriptures

Today’s readings celebrate the new life promised to believers through Jesus, the Christ. The prophet Ezekiel announces that, at the word of the Lord, God will restore the people and breathe into them God’s Spirit. Paul explains that those who belong to Christ have Christ’s Spirit living within, enlivening and empowering. Jesus demonstrates his power to give life by raising his friend Lazarus from the dead.

Ezekiel 37:12-14
Ezekiel’s message of hope, addressed to the despairing exiles in Babylon, begins with his vision of the valley of dry bones. Even as God shows Ezekiel the bones of those long dead lying dry and stripped of flesh, God promises renewal to Israel. In a radical act of new creation, not dependent on historical probability or on their moral or religious worthiness, the Lord will bring them out of the grave of Babylon to their home in Israel and put the Spirit in them. The vision is not of individual or even corporate resurrection, but of the community’s restoration.

Romans 8:8-11
In this reading, Paul contrasts life in the flesh with life in the Spirit. Paul uses the “Spirit of God” (v. 9), the “Spirit of Christ” (v. 9), and “Christ in you (plural)” (v. 10) interchangeably. He emphasizes that the source of the Spirit is God, that the full manifestation of the Spirit is in Christ, and that Christians experience the Spirit communally in the Christian community.

But Christ’s indwelling does not exempt Christians from physical death, for their bodies are still mortal, subject to death. But it does endow them with a new quality of life that will allow them to triumph finally over death. Christ’s resurrection marked the beginning of the age to come. At the culmination of that age, death will be destroyed. Until then, through the Spirit, God brings that future into the present and Christians begin to live their new life.

John 11:1-45
John here combines a miracle narrative and a teaching dialogue. The result makes clear the meaning of this last and greatest of Jesus’ signs revealing “the glory of God” (v. 40), that is, God’s visible presence manifested in the person and acts of Jesus. The raising of Lazarus solidifies the hostility of the authorities against Jesus and marks the transition from his ministry to his passion.

The note that Lazarus had been dead for four days (burial customarily took place within 24 hours) establishes that he was truly dead, for popular belief held that the soul of a person remained near the body for three days.

Jesus reacts at the horror of death with intense emotion, mingling grief, compassion and anger. He prays for the bystanders, that they may perceive the truth of this sign. As God’s word gave life and light in creation, so now the Word made flesh gives light and life as signs of the eternal life that he gives.

Reflection
We’ve all experienced the frustrations caused by delays. “If you’d gotten the tickets sooner, the movie wouldn’t be sold out!” “If I hadn’t waited to buy that plane ticket, I could’ve gotten a direct flight!” “If you had made your deposit earlier, the bank wouldn’t have charged you for the overdraft.” “If only we could leave work early enough to beat rush hour!”

So Martha’s complaint to Jesus, while a more serious matter, sounds familiar: “If you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21). Yet she pushes further, dares to hope for more, in the mysterious way that Jesus’ mother mentions the wine shortage at Cana. Her attitude contrasts with that of the bystanders, who never dream that this “procrastinator” can still do something powerful.

It’s lovely to think that Jesus responds to Martha’s encouragement. Angry with the trappings of death, he asserts who he most deeply is: “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Gateway to life, he calls his own by name. And Lazarus responds, lurching into daylight, blinking his eyes. Do we, like Martha, place our trust in the source of all life, and like Lazarus move, albeit awkwardly, toward him?
The Scriptures and the Catechism

Christian conversion is best understood as a participation in the process of dying and rising with Christ (CCC, #1691–98). Jesus brings Lazarus back to this life (described most correctly as a resuscitation rather than a resurrection CCC, #646) as a sign of what God will give Jesus—a completely new life through the resurrection (CCC, #988–1019). From our baptism onward, our conversion process plunges us ever more deeply into this mystery of Christ’s new life.

The World of the Bible

More on the Gospel of John

Although not directly based on the other gospels, John’s good news about Jesus is rooted in the same Christian traditions. He stresses Jesus’ divinity as God’s Son and the community’s equality as Jesus’ friends. More than any other gospel, John stresses the intimate relationship of Jesus the Son, to God the Father.

Jesus is the Word of God, the revealer of the mystery of God in our midst. He has come down from God to show us who God is and what God wants. He can do this because of his personal experience and his special relationship with God. He teaches in long speeches and performs signs that help us understand his message. Before he returns, he gives us the Holy Spirit to carry on his work and to abide with us in his place.

Jesus calls disciples into intimacy with him and so with God. His disciples are no longer merely pupils, but “friends” (15:15). John’s community is a group conscious of its intimate relationship to Jesus, as Jesus’ words at the Last Supper make clear. They are a community of Jesus’ friends who share the life of Jesus because they share the Holy Spirit. They are characterized by their love for one another. They are to love as Jesus has loved them—a love that is not only intimate but which gives everything for the beloved. Jesus’ death is the ultimate sign of his love.

A mysterious figure appears in John’s gospel. This “beloved disciple” is the model of loving friendship for John’s congregation. He is so intimate with Jesus that he can rest his head on Jesus at the last supper (13:23). In contrast to Peter, he faithfully follows Jesus during the passion, even getting Peter into the courtyard of the High Priest (18:15). Although Peter denies Jesus and runs away, the beloved disciple stands at the foot of the cross (19:26). Jesus tells the beloved disciple to care for His mother. After the resurrection, the beloved disciple more quickly believes in the resurrection (20:8) and recognizes the mysterious risen Lord (21:7).

John invites us to build a community in which “all might be one” (17:21). His ideal of loving friendship can help us create renewed experiences of Christian community in which people really know one another, pray together and reach out to others through their witness and concern.

The World of the Bible

Crucifixion and Resurrection

Crucifixion was the most painful torture the ancient world had devised. Besides the pain from scourging, beating, loss of blood and lack of vital fluids, when one’s arms and legs were fixed to a cross by tying with rope or nailing, the victim began a slow process of asphyxiation.

As the upper body muscles rigidly tightened in prolonged contraction, breathing became more and more difficult and painful. The only relief was to push oneself up by using one’s legs. When the legs could no longer lift the body up, breathing stopped and the victim died. Thus death could be hastened by breaking the victim’s legs (John 19:31-32).

What then happened on Easter was a complete surprise to the disciples. The Jesus that they had known and who had surely died was suddenly experienced as alive again. This new life, described as resurrection, was not just a restoration of one’s former earthly life—a resuscitation from the dead—but a whole new way of existing.

The prophets Elijah and Elisha had brought people back to this life, as had Jesus for the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and his beloved friend Lazarus. Although their return from the dead left them temporarily alive again, they were still subject to death. But Jesus’ resurrection was a new life that would not be subject to death again. It was eternal life—permanent and undying existence in the presence of God forever.