

SATURDAY OF LAZARUS AND PALM SUNDAY

Magazine pages 1–3

MATERIALS

- *Journey through Holy Week* zine for each student
- Questions from Step 4 for distribution to small groups
- Bible for each student or small group

God can surprise us and fulfill our hopes.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- **Identify** the joy that Jesus brought people when He answered their greatest hopes.
- **Connect** with this joy and bring it into their present life.

INTRODUCTION

On each of these days, Jesus does something that surprises the people around Him. On Saturday, He restores the people's faith and hope by raising Lazarus from the dead, teaching that all people can hope in their own resurrection from the dead. On Palm Sunday, the surprise is simple (and it foreshadows the greater surprise that is to come): when Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem riding on a humble donkey. This delights them, because it fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9: that the "king would come humble and mounted on . . . the **foal** of a donkey."

The people excitedly welcomed Jesus as a king, but would their excitement fade or give way to anger or betrayal? Over the course of Holy Week, when Jesus fulfilled God's will and not the people's will, they became angry with Him.

The first lesson teaches that **when we are surprised and excited about a blessing from God, this is only the beginning of faith.** Christian faith requires that we strive to remain faithful to God no matter what happens.

Opening Prayer

Lord our God, the source of all wisdom and truth, send down upon us the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of discernment. Enlighten the eyes of our souls with the light of Your knowledge, that we may learn from Your wisdom and grow in virtue, to the glory of Your name. Amen.

PROCEDURES

1. Focusing activity

To get the students thinking about the element of surprise, ask the following questions:

- Can you name something that you wished for really hard, something really wanted, that came true?
- What happened after that?
- If you were excited about it, how long did that excitement last?
- Did things get boring? Did you ever start to complain about it?
- Was there ever anything that didn't turn out how you wanted it to, even though you were really excited at first?
- Ask the students to give examples and explain their reasoning.

Alternative: Use the "Hopes Up!" activity (found at the end of this guide). You will need to redirect the questions below to focus on hope instead of surprise.

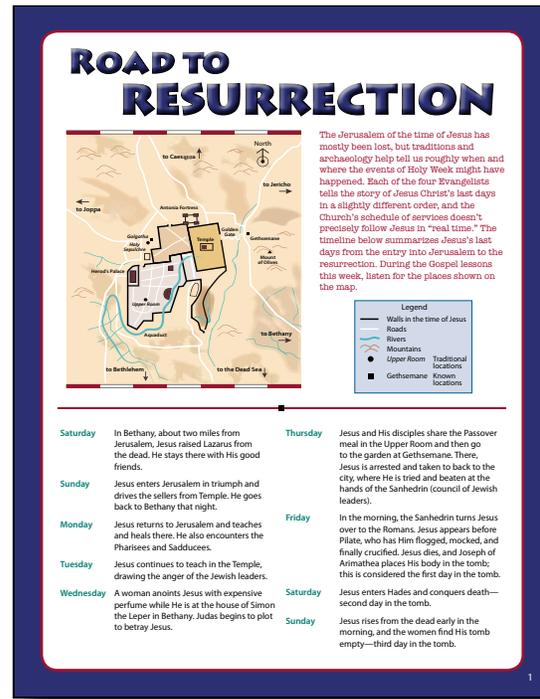
2. Name present praxis

Ask students:

- Has there been a time in your life when God surprised you with a joyous blessing?

This may be difficult for students, so you may need to guide this process to make it easier. You might share a personal example, tell about recent news item, or offer categories such as: at school, with family, with friends. An especially appropriate example could be it involved a time of sadness that ended with a joyous surprise.

Allow students to share examples and discuss.



3. Reflect on present praxis

Ask students:

- What do these kinds of surprises do for our faith?
- How do they help us?
- How do we feel when God blesses us with a joyful surprise?

You may want to record students' responses on a board or chart paper. Responses may include: faith becomes stronger; know that God cares for us; feel certain and secure in God; feel able to trust and rely on God.

4. Access the Christian story and vision

Be sure that the students have read pages 2–3.

Tell students:

Lazarus's family and friends felt extreme joy, and their most desperate hopes were fulfilled when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. This was a shock that they never could have expected. They were still celebrating in this joy, and as the news of the miracle spread,

SATURDAY OF LAZARUS

Jesus wept (John 11:35).

Why did He weep? He was sad for a reason that would sadden many of us, too. His friend Lazarus had died. On what we call the "Saturday of Lazarus," we find Jesus at a very human, emotional place. This story takes us from sadness to joy and leads us into the hope for an even greater joy. Lazarus was the brother of Jesus's close friends Mary and Martha. When Lazarus dies of sickness, Jesus Christ feels and expresses the real human emotion of sadness. When Martha asks Jesus why He did not keep her brother alive, He reminds her to believe so she may "see the glory of God" (John 11:40). Even though His sadness is real, Jesus knows that something greater is coming. Jesus's tears show that He is human, but His next move shows that He is God. It says much more about all other human beings, too. He calls Lazarus to "come forth" and rise from the dead. Lazarus's sisters are overjoyed, of course. When someone we love dies, who doesn't wish that God would bring that person back to us?

When Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, He gives Mary and Martha what their hearts desired more than anything else at that moment—another chance at life, a new life for their brother. For Lazarus, Jesus undoes the highest pain that we all must face: death.

We remember the raising of Lazarus on the weekend between Great Lent, which ended the night before, and Holy Week, which begins the evening of Palm Sunday. But at a practical level for us, Holy Week begins here, with a real human family and the resurrection of a real human being, a person like any of us. Holy Week will end with Pascha Sunday, with the resurrection of our Lord. Putting the two together brings hope to the rest of the human family.

If Jesus can raise His friend Lazarus, He can do the same for all of us. And we believe that He will. After a week of persecution and suffering, He accomplishes His own resurrection, but only after raising His friend. Together, the raising of Lazarus and the holy resurrection of Christ show us that we will all be raised.

This is why we begin our journey through Holy Week with the raising of Lazarus. It reminds us of our hope for the completion of our journey. Jesus Christ brings the miracle to one man, and then He lives through it Himself, making the resurrection and eternal life possible for every one of us.

Raising of Lazarus

- The shortest passage in the Bible is John 11:35.
- Icons are not afraid to remind us of reality. In this icon, one of the people closest to the tomb of Lazarus holds a cloth over his nose and mouth to protect himself from any foul smells coming from the tomb. Even the story in the Bible mentions this—read John 11:39.

In many churches, after the Divine Liturgy on the Saturday of Lazarus, children are invited to make crosses out of palm branches. These crosses will be distributed the following day, Palm Sunday. It is a chance for children to make a special contribution by giving a gift to the whole church.

PALM SUNDAY

Picture your favorite professional athlete, actor, or singer cruising down the main street of your town in a stretch limousine. Can you see the adoring fans cheering, waving banners, jostling to get closer? This is what we hear as we enter the town of Jerusalem with Jesus on Palm Sunday. Think of the movie stars on the red carpet in Hollywood; the Jewish people of Jerusalem lay down palm branches as a carpet. They have high hopes for their "star," wishing that Jesus would become a powerful king who would free them from their harsh suffering under the Romans. They hope that Jesus will be the promised king who will restore the nation of Israel to its former glory, as it was during the time of Kings David and Solomon.

Now picture your celebrity driving an old, dented car instead of waving from a limo. Christ doesn't have an old car, but He does ride into town the common person's way: on a donkey. His fans in Jerusalem expected to see their king riding high on a proud stallion. But Jesus chooses to ride a donkey—a humble beast of burden, an animal of peace—to show that the people should not expect an earthly kingdom. His kingdom is, and will be like nothing on earth.

When we enter the church on Palm Sunday, we enter Jerusalem with Christ. And because we enter with Him, we also will "suffer" with Him, and this service begins His suffering and betrayal. To suffer with Him does not mean that we should feel pain. Instead of pain, we suffer with hope for and joy in the coming resurrection, which gives this suffering a purpose and meaning.

If you look around the church, you may notice that it is decorated with palm branches. Each person receives a palm cross at the end of the service. There are many customs, too: some churches will also distribute branches of bay leaves, flowers, or pussy willows. All of these remind us of the people who waved palm branches to welcome Jesus and laid them at His feet as He entered Jerusalem.

Entry into Jerusalem

- Icons frequently use "shortbread" to describe places, events, and ideas. The small group of buildings in background represents the whole city of Jerusalem.
- What are the children in the icon doing? How might they describe Jesus's entry into the city to their friends?

A hymn we sing on both Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday reminds us why we carry palm branches and what the raising of Lazarus means for all of us:

"To confirm the general resurrection before your passion, you resurrected Lazarus from the dead, O Christ our God. Therefore imitating the children, carrying the symbols of victory, we cry out to you the Victor over death: Hosanna in the highest; blessed are you, the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

people in Jerusalem welcomed Him by laying down palm branches as a carpet when Jesus entered Jerusalem.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey for two reasons: He was showing humility, but also He was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9. The Jewish people, who knew the Scriptures and were looking forward to the one who would fulfill the prophecies and their hopes, were even more excited to see the prophecy being fulfilled in this way, which added to their joy.

Turn students' attention to the icons and hymns on the sides of pages 2 and 3.

Depending on the size of your class, divide the class into groups of 2 or 3. Have each group or pair respond to one of the following prompts. Let students know that they will share when they are done:

A. The shortest verse in the Bible is John 11:35, "Jesus wept." What is important about this verse in the story about Lazarus? What does this tell us about Jesus? What is He crying about? Why is this passage important for our faith as Christians?

B. In the icon on page 2, one person holds a cloth over his nose and mouth to protect himself from foul smells coming from Lazarus's tomb. Read John 11:39, which mentions this. Why do you think St. John included this when he wrote about Lazarus's death and being raised?

C. On page 3, in the icon of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, what are the children doing? How might children who witnessed Jesus' entry describe this if they are telling their friends about it the next day? Contrast the children with the adults in the icon.

5. Appropriate the story and vision

Have each group or pair share their responses with the whole group. Look for answers such as:

A. To say that "Jesus wept" shows that Jesus, God himself, in His son, was grieving for His dead friend. For our Christian faith, this emphasizes His humanity. It also shows that His love for us is real and genuine, and He really and genuinely wants us to live forever. Another point is that this sadness from God himself makes the raising of Lazarus that

much more joyful. Because Jesus was truly sad about Lazarus's death, then He was genuinely overjoyed to bring Lazarus back to life. (You may need to remind the students that Lazarus would eventually face his own death again, many years later. The Church believes that Lazarus was a bishop in the early days of Christianity.)

- B. St. John included the detail about a smell coming from Lazarus's tomb, to emphasize that Lazarus had really died, and that it was truly a tremendous miracle that Jesus brought him back to life. In Hebrew thought, the spirit was believed to leave a deceased body after three days; because Lazarus had been dead for four days, this showed that he really was dead.
- C. The children are laying down their shirts and jackets to add to the "carpet" of palm branches for Jesus to walk on. They might describe the excitement that the whole city felt when they saw Jesus coming in on a donkey. The adults are doing very little. It is the children who recognize the importance of Jesus.

6. Decision for lived response

The most important message and part of these two days is expressed in the hymn on the bottom of page 3, that Jesus "confirmed the general resurrection" when He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Review and emphasize the message for students:

- Jesus showed the world that all people will rise from the dead in Christ.
- This means that people do not need to be afraid of death.
- Death is not the end, and there is hope for something beyond this life.

Students must make a decision about how this knowledge will change them and change their lives. Ask students these simple questions:

- What should your life be like if you have faith, hope, and joy that God will raise you from the dead to live eternally?
- What do we do with this great faith, hope, and joy?
- How can we better deal with the unexpected tragedies, challenges, and sadness in our lives? We have to keep our eyes on Christ and His plans for us.

Closing Prayer Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian

O Lord and Master of my life,
deliver me from the spirit
of laziness, meddling, vain
ambition, and idle talk.

Grant to me, Your servant, the
spirit of prudence, humility,
patience, and love.

Yes, Lord and King; grant me
that I may see my own faults,
and to not judge my brothers
and sisters, for You are blessed
to the ages of ages. Amen.