

# GOSPEL WONDERS

**A different way to look at the gospels**

## **Lazarus (suggested) Order of Service**

1. Welcome and opening prayer, followed by the Lord's prayer
2. Hymn 20 – Be still for the presence of the Lord
3. Simeon remembers
4. Hymn 403 – God is love
5. Rachel remembers
6. Hymn 247 – I danced in the morning
7. Elizabeth remembers
8. Hymn 370 – Breathe on me breath of God
9. Reflections on the story of Lazarus
10. Prayers of intercession
11. Hymn 248 – Blest are the Pure in Heart
12. Conclusion
13. Hymn 338 – There is a Redeemer

(all hymns from Singing the Faith)

## Opening Prayer

Let us think of beauty. The many kinds of beauty: the beauty of nature with its towering mountains, glorious sunrises, the magnificence of the beasts on land, in the sea and in the air and the splendour and might of the tall trees. But away from those that we can see, the very physical things that surround us, what about those hidden beauties that enhance our lives. Those feelings and emotions that carry us forward: friendship, joy, support and over the top the overarching presence of love. The love of a parent for a child, a child for a parent, or of one person for another. Those beauties that are within us but which are sometimes so difficult to understand or explain.

Then the most beautiful of all loves. The love of our Heavenly Father. One so magnificent that all we can do is accept it with grateful thanks and praise and offer our humble love and worship in return.

So Lord, we come before you today to do just that. We come before you in awe with thanks for all you do for us, and all you are to us.

As a part of your love the Lord Jesus told us that that if we failed You in the way we behaved and so we let you down. Our sincere confession, through Him, would be accepted by you and your forgiveness would be ours. Lord! You know us so well. How often do we let you down? Sometimes by thoughtlessness we say and do things which hurt or upset others. At others we deliberately act in a way which shows you in a poor light. Sometimes our conscience warns us that all is not well.

So my friends, let us use this time to prepare ourselves for the rest of our service, search our hearts and ask ourselves the question is there anything we need to ask forgiveness for?

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Jesus died and rose again for us. Through his sacrifice our sins are forgiven.

Lord's Prayer.

## Simeon remembers

Now I am an old man. But when I was a boy, I remember Jesus coming to our village and the way it was. He was the most popular man in the area. He and the group that travelled with Him. Most people remember his twelve special friends but don't forget there were some women as part of his party, and some of them were pretty important and wealthy in their own right. I remember them because they were always kind to us, that is, me and my friends. We used to hang around the camp hoping that Jesus would talk to us. I suppose it was a kind of hero worship. He was somebody who would always notice and look after people. It was really exciting being there at the centre of things.

The camp was set up on the outside of the village under some palm trees but they were always around the village teaching. They used to meet in the centre round the well. Then in the evening people would come from the village to ask Jesus questions.

Suddenly our generally quiet village began to bustle with noise and people. It went very quiet when they left.

His interest in people made what happened more surprising. That day I was hanging around the camp as usual when I heard this angry conversation going on between two of his people. One of them said: "But he's got to go. It's one of his best and oldest friends and the girls will expect it."

The other said: "Maybe he should go but he isn't going to. He says he is staying here and that's that. Can't you have a word with him?"

The other replied: "What can I do about it? If he won't go, he won't go. What do you expect me to do about it?"

Then a couple of days later I heard the same two talking:

"Well now he's going. It's a bit late though, the man's dead and him talking about it being to God's glory isn't going to be much comfort to the ones he let down".

The other one said: "I still can't see why he didn't go the other day. Now I don't know where they were talking about, but from what I overheard, the last time he had been to that village there had been some trouble.

Now let me think. What was it that the chap said, the one who always managed to look at the bad side?"

"Oh yes, he said 'Alright, I suppose we had better go. If they are going to kill him, we might as well be there' or something like that anyway.

All this didn't mean anything to me but by the next day they had all gone. We heard something about his friend having been dead but now he was not dead, but it was only years later that I learned the full story.

How did that come about? Well, I'll tell you. By then I started work and my master had to go to that village on business. He took me along with him. He ended up getting very angry with me for not concentrating. Why wasn't I concentrating? I had run into the most amazing pair of beautiful brown eyes and that was it. I couldn't see straight let alone concentrate on work. Anyway, to cut a long story short, when I got home, I spoke to my father who spoke to her father and they both spoke to the village leaders and they worked out all the legal stuff, you know bride price and dowry and between them they got it all sorted out and that was that. Yes, thinking about it, it was all a long time ago.

How does that affect my story? Well, my Rachel was there when Jesus finally arrived so I will ask her to tell you what happened.

## Rachel remembers

So, my Simeon has been telling you about me and what happened the day Jesus came to the village when Lazarus died the first time.

He's right, I was there that day. Lazarus had died and his sisters were having to sort everything out. They were a pair those two. Different as chalk and cheese. One was highly organised and everything in its place while the other was swanning about with her head in the clouds.

Anyway, they knew Jesus. He was a family friend. He'd visited them in the past so it was natural that, when Lazarus was taken so seriously ill, they would only need to send for him and he would be there to make everything right. We knew that a messenger had been sent so expected that he would be turning up that day. But he never came. They were in despair.

And then Lazarus died. Jesus still did not come so the burial had to take place.

Our tradition was that when somebody died, the spirit stayed around for two days trying to find a way back, then gave up and left. The practicalities of the situation, you know, what happens to a body in our temperature, meant that it had to be buried pretty quickly. So that was what happened to poor Lazarus. Placed in his tomb, a cave near the village, a stone rolled across the entrance and that was that.

Then Jesus turned up. One of his followers said that he had the message a few days ago but had decided not to come straight away. What it meant was that when he did arrive, there was no doubt that Lazarus was dead. And still Jesus didn't go to the house, but waited outside the village.

They told Mary and she stormed straight up to him. "If you had been here, he wouldn't have died. You were his friend. Why didn't you come when he needed you?"

Then she burst into tears and fell sobbing at Jesus feet. All eyes were on Jesus. Nobody had seen anything like it before. Not something you would have expected from super organised Mary. Haranguing Jesus like that. You could almost hear the whole village holding its breath.

The Jesus leaned forward, lifted her up and with his arm around her shoulder walked with her to the grave.

He had to convince a couple of men that it was alright to roll the stone away from the tomb entrance. They complained that he had been dead four days now and in this heat? But eventually, they did what he had asked.

Jesus said three words. "Lazarus come out." Lazarus came out all wholesome and sweet and then everyone went home.

Lazarus had a good few years after that.

Mind you, that wasn't quite the end of it. Well, you know how people talk. I mean, I was only a child at the time but I still heard what people were saying. Some were asking why Jesus said what he did in his prayer in front of the tomb, you know, the bit about the people standing by knowing who sent him. Some said that as Jesus knew what was going to happen why did he think that was necessary? What was it all about? Was it a bit of sleight of hand or was it important? Others said that because people were beginning to believe that God worked directly through him it was necessary to involve his name to make the miracle work.

You know how some people will argue the toss about anything and as the story spread this grew into something important. But for those of us who were there it was straightforward. Lazarus was dead; Jesus came and spoke some words; Lazarus was alive. It was a miracle. Simple as that.

By the way, Simeon was telling you the story of how he was captivated by a pair of big brown eyes?

Come on ladies, we all know how it works don't we?

I saw Simeon and decided he was the one for me, so I let him chase me until I caught him!

## Elizabeth remembers

My name is Elizabeth. My husband is Josiah and he is one of the senior officers in the synagogue. His duties include arranging the various events and ceremonies that have to take place. Josiah is a good man and takes his responsibilities seriously. I am always proud of him when I sit in the women's gallery watching him carrying out his various duties. He is well respected and I have to admit that I share in that respect. The good opinion others have of him reflects on me.

I know that some of our men see their wives as a sort of second class, having to keep their hair tied up and walk apart from their husbands in the street. When I am outside, I comply with the law, but at home Josiah has never treated me that way. He has always shown love and respect for me and I feel the same for him. We often spend time together talking and discussing what is going on around us. If you asked me, I would say my life is good.

That's why what happened the other day is so worrying.

Yes, I knew Lazarus; I knew the family. They were well thought of in the village and though I couldn't say we were great friends we always got on well.

Anyway, Josiah carried out his role in the funeral in accordance with the law and that was it. Lazarus was laid to rest in the proper manner.

The Josiah came home one day really very worried. That evening we talked about it and he told me that he got a message to say that Lazarus was live and at home.

He had gone to the house and sure enough there was a celebration going on and there at the head of the table was Lazarus enjoying a meal. Poor Josiah didn't know what to make of it. It was explained to him that Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth had brought him back to life.

Josiah was so worried that he might have done something wrong. Missed out one of the required checks and stages in the funeral procedure; forgotten something and allowed a live man to be buried. That night we went through the whole thing in detail and everything that should have been done was done and properly too. There were no mistakes or omissions on Josiah's part. When he was buried, Lazarus was definitely dead. It was all so puzzling.

I suggest that in order to understand what had happened, we should go and find out what this Jesus has been saying and just see how he has been able to do something like this. We did and found ourselves drawn to what was such an amazing message. It was all so different. Josiah found it did not stop him taking his duties at the synagogue seriously, but it has rather disturbed his, in fact, our ideas. The whole business has been rather upsetting and we are having to reassess our thinking in a number of different ways.



## Reflections

What had happening that day in a Middle Eastern village 2000 years ago? Let's look at the situation. Well first what was Jesus about? He was on his way to Jerusalem. Though, in hindsight, we know how that journey would end, His travelling companions could only guess at what was to happen.

We get the impression from the time that Jesus first heard about Lazarus that He was waiting, and even when He arrived in the village He stayed on the outside until Mary and Martha came out to Him.

While we may never know what exactly happened that day, we can see a pattern developing. First of all, at the delay in moving meant that when He arrived there were a lot of people there who had come to offer their condolences to the family. Then when He arrived at the tomb people knew that He was there and had come to see what was going to happen, so this was a very public event.

The importance of this event was of major significance starting, as it did, the most important process in the history of the world. It meant that when Jesus made His way into Jerusalem there were many people who knew the story of Lazarus and wanted to see Jesus. What Mary and Martha thought we can only just surmise? Maybe they just looked at each other and said something like,

*"Just when you think you understand Him, He does something that leaves you bewildered again"*

Was Jesus making the point that He had the power over life and death? Certainly He had brought people back to life before but nobody who had been dead for four days. Was that why Jesus had been waiting. In this Jesus linking the world with heaven through himself. Like a cord running through Him to heaven there had always been this connection between God and His people, even though, over the years this cord had become frayed and threatened to break. This was why Jesus came to bring healing to a dis-eased world.

Jesus demonstrates that He has the power over life and death. Trust and believe in my Father He says. He asks me to do that and I ask you to trust me. Why do you think I took so long to come? Because I didn't want you or anyone to think it was all a trick

It may seem that the world is rapidly going downhill. That time and again we move towards our ideals and then loose our way.

Everybody was convinced that Lazarus was dead, including his family. They were the ones who said

*"You are too late"*

On Good Friday, everybody thought Jesus was dead, including His family.

The end is not in sight as long as Jesus is held in the hearts of His people.

Remember Jesus said

*“I am the resurrection and the life”*

What is going to happen will happen. He said

*“Trust me and all will be well”*

## Prayers of intercession

Now we come to a time to move away from the personal and bring before the Lord those people and situations that we hear of and which give us concern in the wider world so again let us pray.

Where to start? The church, this vast worldwide and growing organisation to which we all belong. We would pray for all those with the responsibilities of organisation, management and application. So many working at all levels towards the spreading of your message. That they are be able to truly interpret your will and teach it to others. Your message of love used in so many ways to reach and change the human heart.

We cannot forget those who, because they acknowledge you as their Lord suffer persecution. Some experience physical pain and even death, others who are discriminated against and yet others who are ostracised all because of their love for you.

We pray that you will look after them, keep them strong and steady in their faith. Let them know that they are not alone that there are people all over the world who pray for them and most importantly that you are there beside them protecting them with your love.

Then Lord we must think about the world in general. A world where we look around and see so many different views being expressed, so many attitudes, struggles for power and wealth so often at the expense of the weak and powerless who have not the wherewithal to help themselves and are swept along in the chaos that flows round them. Reach down into the hearts of those in power and teach them the way to build not destroy. Let your kingdom come.

Now let us pray on a personal level. We, all of us, have people we care for and special situations that rest on our hearts. So now is the time, in the silence, to bring them before the Lord.

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Our gracious Lord. We bring our prayers before. We give our thanks for the opportunity to do this and ask that you consider them and give them your blessing.

In and through our lord Jesus we pray.

**AMEN.**

## Blessing

(taken from hymn 594 verse 3)

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have come to us,  
born as one of us,  
Mary's son;  
led out to die in Calvary,  
risen from death to set us free,  
living Lord Jesus, help us see  
you are Lord.

Followed by the sharing of the Grace.