

The context for the story of the raising of Lazarus is the religious leaders' growing animosity toward Jesus. Jesus has been in Jerusalem, taking part in the feast of Hanukkah. The people have been pressing him to declare plainly whether he is the Messiah. Jesus tells them to look to his works, which testify to his coming from God. Many do not believe Jesus, however, and some try to stone him for blasphemy.

Into this scene of confrontation, Mary and Martha, send word to Jesus that his friend is ill. Jesus is said to love Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, but he delays his journey for two days. The delay heightens the drama and shows Jesus' obedience to God, who is to be glorified through Lazarus's resurrection.

Jesus asks to be brought to Lazarus's tomb where he prays and calls Lazarus out from the tomb. At this sign, many come to believe in Jesus, but others take word of the miracle to the religious authorities, who begin their plans for Jesus' death.

Set against the backdrop of Jesus' impending death, many elements of the raising of Lazarus foreshadow the good news of Jesus' own Resurrection. In raising Lazarus, Jesus shows his power over death so that when Jesus dies, those who believe in him might remember that and take hope. Just as Jesus calls for the stone to be rolled away from Lazarus's tomb, so too will the disciples find the stone rolled away from Jesus' tomb.

In Baptism we join ourselves with Christ, who conquered death once and for all so that we who believe in him may have eternal life. With Martha and Mary, we are called to profess our belief that Jesus is the Resurrection and the life.