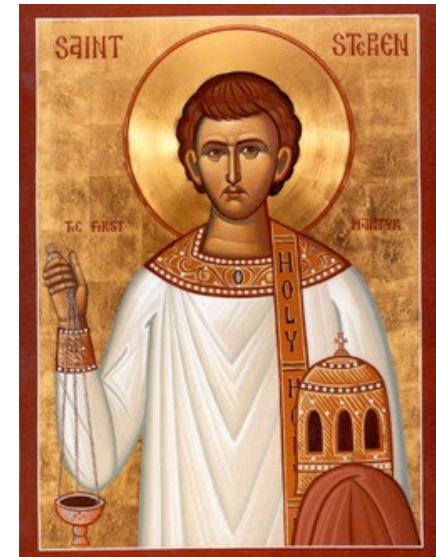


# Feasts of the Incarnation

Part II: St. Stephen, St. John, and The Holy  
Innocents

# St. Stephen, Deacon & Martyr: Dec. 26

- We give you thanks, O Lord of glory, for the example of the first martyr Stephen, who looked up to heaven and prayed for his persecutors to your Son Jesus Christ, who stands at your right hand; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen*
- c. 5-34 AD
- First martyr of the Christian Church
- Scriptural Reference: Acts 6-7

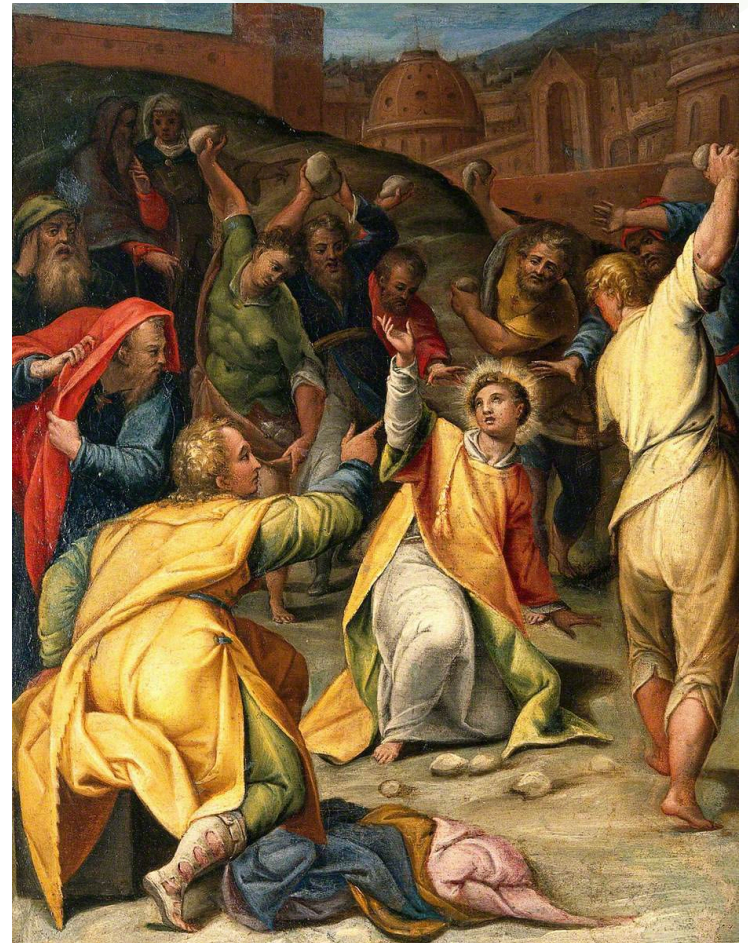


## Acts 6: 8-15

Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated some men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.' They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, 'This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.' And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

# St. Stephen, Deacon & Martyr: Dec. 26

- Deacon in early Christian Church
- Sent to minister to widows and the poor
  - Distribution of food
- Taught at the Synagogues of Hellenistic (Greek) Jews
- Brought before Sanhedrin for blasphemy
- Stephen's apology (speech)
- Stephen is stoned to death
  - Paul approves and participates in this event



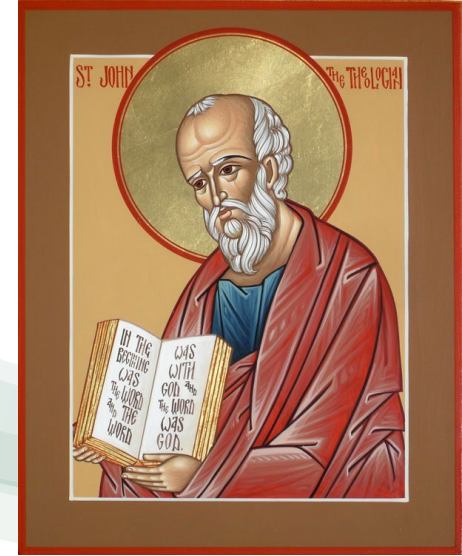


# St. Stephen's Day

- December 26
- Boxing Day (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, UK)
- “Good King Wenceslas”
- Ireland
  - Wren Day: dress up, visiting neighbors, singing, dancing, music
  - Mumming or pantomime
- Italy
  - Public Holiday
- Austria and Germany
  - Horseback riding, blessing of horses, ceremonial drinking
- Finland
  - Celebratory sleigh rides, parades, weddings



# St. John, Apostle & Evangelist: Dec. 27



- Shed upon your Church, O Lord, the brightness of your light, that we, being illumined by the teaching of your apostle and evangelist John, may so walk in the light of your truth, that at length we may attain to the fullness of eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
- c. 6-100 AD
- One of the 12 disciples



## Matthew 4: 18-22

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake – for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

## Luke 9: 51-56

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, ‘Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?’ But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

# St. John, Apostle & Evangelist: Dec. 27



- John the Evangelist, John of Patmos, John the Elder, Beloved Disciple
- Author of Gospel of John, Letters of John, Revelation???
- Begins ministry in Judea
- Moves to Ephesus, working with Paul to found Church there
- Banished to Island of Patmos by Roman authorities
- Teaches Polycarp – later Bishop of Smyrna, and Ignatius of Antioch – martyr and apostolic father



# St. John's Day



- December 27
- Blessing of Wine to be used throughout the year
- Lighting of candles and other lights by children named John, Joan, etc.

# The Holy Innocents: Dec. 28

- We remember today, O God, the slaughter of the holy innocents of Bethlehem by King Herod. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and establish your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*
- First commemorated ~485 as feast day
- Scriptural Reference: Matthew 2: 16-18



# Matthew 2: 16-18

When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

‘A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.

# The Holy Innocents: Dec. 28

- King Herod orders execution of children in order to find Jesus
- Some question as to whether this event actually occurred
  - Story parallels Exodus – Pharoah and Moses, Herod and Jesus
- Victim numbers are wide ranging (144,000-24)
- Popular subject for art and music
  - Coventry Carol







# The Holy Innocents Day

- December 28
- Middle Ages:
  - Role reversal day – children took on adult roles
  - No working on that day of the week for the entire year!
- Today:
  - Day of pranks
  - Flour fights
  - Blessing of children's toys



# Why Martyrdom at Christmas?

- Representational of the three forms of Martyrdom
- Celebration of new life alongside death parallels Passion of Jesus
- Incarnation not separate from sacrifice of God – Christ born to die
- Historically, part of what it means to follow Christ
  - Giving of life for the newborn Savior

# What does this mean for us?

- “Martyr” means “witness”
- As we witness the lives of these martyrs, we witness the reason for their death: Christ
- Today, still oppression and persecution of Christians throughout the world
  - We have ability to remember and commemorate as we are able to practice freely
  - Important for us not to become complacent