

## **Feast of St. Stephen**

When I was growing up I always thought it was strange that I would attend church with my family on the Nativity of our Lord and hear the reading about Jesus's birth in Bethlehem, then attend church the next day on the the feast of the Synaxis of the Mother of God and hear the reading about the Holy Family's flight into Egypt, and then on the third day at the liturgy for the feast of St. Stephen, all of a sudden we are "transported" to a time after Jesus's Resurrection and hear the account of the stoning of St. Stephen. I used to think what in the world does this have to do with Christmas? It wasn't until I was older that I learned that these feasts are very much connected. In the feast of the Nativity of our Lord, we celebrate the birth of Jesus from Heaven to Earth and in the feast of St. Stephen, we celebrate the birth of St. Stephen from Earth to Heaven. So, we continue to celebrate the theme of birth throughout the whole Nativity season.

St. Stephen would become the protomartyr of the Church or the first martyr. The word martyr means witness, so St. Stephen becomes the first witness with his life of Christ's Truth. If the life, death, and resurrection of Christ were just a myth, would thousands upon thousands of witnesses beginning with St. Stephen to the present day be willing to be horribly tortured and killed for a lie? Two thousand years later St. Stephen continues to witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ in thousands upon thousands of churches throughout the world on his feast day. As Christ continues to live to this present day, so does St. Stephen and all of the witnesses of Christ throughout the years to the present day.

As Christ continues to intercede on behalf of all humanity to this present day, so does St. Stephen, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." The Father would answer their prayers and grant forgiveness to St. Paul, whose conversion would shock the Jewish world of his time and put him on course to become one of the greatest apostles and Saints in all of Christian history. May Christ and St. Stephen continue to pray even now for our conversion and that we too might be born from Earth to Heaven and become great followers of Christ.