

St Gregory of Nyssa on St Stephen

“How did Stephen see transcendent glory? Who laid bare heaven's gates for him? Was this the work of men? Which of the angels enabled inferior [human] nature to soar to that height? Stephen was not alone when he was generously filled with power coming from the angels which enabled him to see what he saw. What was recorded? *"Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and saw the glory of God and his Only-Begotten Son"* [Acts 7.55].

“As the Prophet says, light cannot be seen unless one is filled with light: *"In your light we shall see light"* [Ps 35.10] (If observation of the light does not share this same light, how can anyone deprived of the sun's rays see it?). Since the Father's light makes this possible, the Only Begotten [Son's] light emanates through the Holy Spirit which makes it visible. Therefore the Spirit's glory enables us to perceive the glory of both the Father and Son.”

Homily One on the Saint



SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY DECEMBER 27, 2020



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Divine Liturgy: Sunday 10:00 AM

Antiphon (Feast)

1. The Lord has said to my Lord: Sit at my right until I make of Your enemies a footstool.
O Son of God, who were born of the Virgin, save us who sing to you Alleluia
2. The Lord shall send You from Zion a scepter of power: be the Master in the midst of Your enemies.
Khallisna YabnAllah, ya man wulida min al Batul, nahnulmuraneemeena Laka. Haleloueya.
3. With You was the beginning, on the day of Your might in the splendor of the holy ones.
O Son of God, who were born of the Virgin, save us who sing to you Alleluia

Entrance Hymn

Priest: From the womb before the morning star I begot You. The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind: “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

People: **O Son of God, who were born of the Virgin, save us who sing to You, Alleluia!**

Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone 5, pg. 40)

Let us, O faithful, praise and worship the Word, coeternal with the Father and the Spirit, born of the Virgin for our Salvation, for He was pleased to be lifted in the flesh upon the cross, and to endure death, and to raise the dead by His glorious resurrection.

Troparion of the Nativity of our Lord (Tone 4)

Your Nativity, O Christ our God, has shed the light of knowledge upon the world. Through it, those who had been star-worshippers learned through a star to worship You, O Sun of Justice, and to recognize in You the One who rises from on high. O Lord glory to You!

Troparion of St. Joseph (Tone 2)

O Joseph, proclaim to David, the ancestor of Christ our God, the great miracles you have witnessed: you have seen the Virgin with child, given praise with the shepherds, adored with the wise men, and an angel of the Lord has appeared to you. Intercede with Christ God that He may save our souls.

Troparion of the Dormition (Tone 1, Pg 15)

In giving birth, you have preserved your virginity and in falling asleep, you did not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life, being the Mother of Life. Through your intercessions, save our souls from death.

Kondakion of the Nativity of our Lord (Tone 3)

Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent in Essence, and the earth presents a cave to the Inaccessible. The angels with the shepherds sing His glory, and the Wise Men with the star travel on their way, for to us is born a new Child, who is God from all eternity.

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him...as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:56-60).

While there had been many Jews martyred for their faith in the one God, Stephen was the first to be slain for his faith in “*the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.*”

The Church of St Stephen

The Scriptures do not identify the place of St Stephen’s death or the site of his burial. Acts 7:58 simply says, “...*they cast him out of the city and stoned him.*” It was presumed that this happened close to the city wall, because St Stephen’s killers were so enflamed with hatred for him that they would have stoned him at the first possible location.

It was commonly believed that Stephen’s teacher, the distinguished rabbi Gamaliel, had arranged for Stephen’s remains to be buried secretly on his property in the country near Beit Shemesh, where a church was later built.

In c. 450 AD, the exiled Empress Eudocia had a large monastic complex built outside the Damascus Gate, where Stephen was reputedly stoned. This was one of several churches which she had caused to be built in the Holy City. The empress arranged for the saint’s relics to be brought from his burial place to her monastery church which would be dedicated to St Stephen.

In the twelfth century, Crusaders defending the city against the troops of Sultan Salah al-Din had the monastery destroyed, as its proximity to the city wall would provide easy access to the invaders.

In the nineteenth century, French Dominican friars purchased several parcels of land adjoining the old city walls, which were strewn here and there with broken columns and other indications that an important structure had once stood there. Excavations unearthed a portion of the church floor, leading the friars to build a new church on the site, substantially on the footprint of Eudocia’s fifth-century church. The modern St Stephen’s Church is currently home to the world-renowned Ecole Biblique, a center for advanced study of the Scriptures.

In 2014, archaeologists from the University of Jerusalem discovered the ruins of an entire church complex in a village near Ramallah, six miles from Jerusalem. An inscription in one of the churches reads that it had been built in honor of St Stephen the Protomartyr, “buried here in AD 35.”

DIVINE LITURGY INTENTIONS

Today Those infected with the coronavirus and those who care for them
The people of Beirut
The sick and suffering of the parish
+Those who have lost their lives to the coronavirus
+Those who lost their lives in the Beirut explosion
+The deceased of the parish

Feast Day Liturgical Schedule

Tuesday Jan 5 , 6PM - Vespers for the Feast of Theophany

Wednesday Jan 6 , 6PM—Divine Liturgy for the Feast of Theophany followed by the Blessing of Water

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

The words above are the traditional Christmas greeting. We are in the midst of celebrating the birth in the flesh of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a time of joy and wonder. There is no fasting even on Wednesday and Friday until January 5, the Paramony of the feast of Theophany. The forty days of the Christmas season begin with Christ's Nativity and end with the feast of the Encounter, which is also known as the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. During this time of Christ's manifestations in the flesh, we try to wrap our heads around how God, who has no beginning or end, took on our human flesh and became one of us, so that we can be restored to our rightful relationship with Him. We sing His glory along with the Angels and shepherds: "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth, peace to men of goodwill. It is peace that we need so much today! We witness Jesus' Birth, Circumcision, Baptism, and Presentation in the Temple. Each year, I am a little awe-struck as I contemplate these manifestations of God and what they mean for each of us.

I wish you all the blessings of this holy season as does my family. Thank you for your generous gifts to the parish as well as to me personally! I am truly blessed to serve you as pastor.

Fr. Bryan



The Bishop's Appeal 2020 Building A Better Life On A Solid Foundation Through Faith & Family

Thank God for all the blessings you received in 2020 by making a generous thanksgiving gift to your Melkite Catholic Church in America. The annual Bishop's Appeal officially ends in all the parishes of the Eparchy on 31 December 2020. **However, gifts to the Appeal will continue to be received and credited to your parish until 31 January 2021 for anyone who makes an end-of-year, tax-deductible donation.** Your gift means so much to so many! Thank you for your generosity. May God bless you and all your family in the New Year.

Last Week's Collection

Regular	\$ 897
Candles	\$ 31
Christmas Flowers	\$ 90
Christmas Donations	\$ 700
Total	\$ 1,718

Remember the Melkite Church in Your Will: Give a lasting gift for future generations of Melkites and help to ensure that our beautiful Melkite heritage continues to grow and flourish for your children's children. Simply add the following statement to your last will and testament: ***I hereby bequeath to the Melkite Eparchy of Newton the following sum: \$_____.*** Contact Bishop NICHOLAS personally to inform him of your generous bequest: 3 VFW Parkway, West Roxbury, MA 02132.

EVERY YEAR, DEC 27 is observed as the feast of the Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen. This year, Dec 27 falls on the Sunday after the Nativity, the memorial of David, Joseph, and James, relatives of the Lord Jesus. St Stephen has an unusually large portion of the Scriptures devoted to him. Chapters six and seven of the Acts of the Apostles are substantially devoted to the story of this important saint.

Stephen as “Archdeacon”

In Acts 6:1-7 we read of the selection of seven “*men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*” (v. 3) to relieve the Apostles of the task of the “*daily distribution*” (v. 1) which was taking them away from their proper ministry of prayer and preaching.

The first believers in Jerusalem had a fund from which they assisted their needy members. In this they were continuing a Jewish practice, based on this precept of the Torah: “*If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the cities in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him...*” (Dt 15:7, 8). Since there was no social service system in the ancient world, the synagogues were the place where needy Jews would go for food and other necessities. Jerusalem’s first believers in Jesus did the same for their members in need, generally the elderly.

The dispute mentioned in Acts 6 was between the native Palestinian Jews and the Hellenized Jews, who had adopted the Greek language and culture dominant in the Roman Empire. The latter believed that their widows were being shortchanged by the natives.

At the request of the Apostles, the community chose seven men to be responsible for this ministry, Stephen being the first among them. The Apostles then prayed and laid hands upon them. This laying-on- of- hands was understood in the Apostolic era as what we call “ordination.” Thus deacons were considered a higher order. In his Epistle to the Philippians, for example, St Paul greets the deacons right after the bishops.

There is no further mention of the “daily distribution” in relation to the ministry of the seven. Stephen and Philip are described as preaching, catechizing and baptizing; the others are not mentioned again in the Scriptures although there are many references to them in the writings of the first century Church.

Stephen as the First Martyr

The rest of chapter 6 and all of chapter 7 of Acts are concerned with the story of Stephen’s martyrdom at the hands of the leading Jews of Jerusalem. Stephen’s eloquence in preaching Christ attracts the attention of some Jewish leaders and Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin, “*and all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel*” (Acts 6:15).

Stephen’s defense of his faith in Jesus begins with a classical presentation of God’s work in the history of Israel. But then he adds, “*Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!*”

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city

Instead of Trisagion - All of You who Have Been Baptized into Christ have Put on Christ. Alleluia!

Prokimenon

Reader: Awesome in His saints is God, the God of Israel.

People: Awesome in His saints is God, the God of Israel.

Verse: In the churches, bless God, the Lord out of Israel’s wellspring.

People: Awesome in His saints is God, the God of Israel.

Reader: Awesome in His saints is God,

People: The God of Israel.

Epistle: Gal. 1:11-19

Alleluia Verses

O Lord remember David and all his anxious care!

Verse: The Lord has made a truthful oath to David from which He shall never depart: “Of the fruit of your loins, I will place one upon your throne.”

Gospel: Mt 2:13-23, Sunday after the Nativity – The Flight to Egypt

Hirmos (Tone 1)

Magnify, O my soul, the Virgin more glorious than the heavenly Powers! Behold a strange and wonderful mystery: the cave is Heaven, the Virgin a Cherubic throne, the manger a noble place where reposes Christ the uncontainable God. Let us praise and magnify Him!

Kinonikon: Ps. 110:9 (Tone 8)

The Lord has sent redemption to His people: He has established His covenant forever. Alleluia!

After Communion - Troparion of the Nativity

Special Petitions for the Ecumenic Prayer (Inserted after the third petition)

- For all your people who have proven positive with the coronavirus, that they may be restored to full health and offer you their praise and thanksgiving, we pray to you, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For all those who have died as a result of the coronavirus that they may be granted rest with the Saints and the mercy of God in the Heavenly Kingdom, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For doctors, nurses, and all in health care, risking their lives to minister to those afflicted with the coronavirus, that they remain safe, and in good health as they serve others, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For all your people in Lebanon who were hurt during the disastrous explosion, that they may be restored to full health, and for those who died that they may be granted rest among the Saints, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.
- For peace throughout the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, we pray to You, Lord, hear us and have mercy.