St. Stephen
December 26
St. Stephen
Biblical Figure

The man stood before the Jewish priests and judges of the Sanhedrin, his face like that of an angel, fearless and bright. His ringing voice proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, whose coming all the prophets had foretold. The men of the Sanhedrin muttered darkly to each other. This man was declaring that Jesus, whom they crucified, was the promised Savior of the world.

After Pentecost, the Apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, fearlessly went forth and preached the Good News. More and more men and women believed in Jesus and were baptized. The Apostles needed help serving the many new Christians and caring for their poor. And so they laid hands on seven men, filling them with the Holy Spirit and making them deacons. These deacons would help the Apostles by serving the poor. The foremost new deacon, filled with wisdom and the Holy Spirit, was Stephen.

Stephen preached to the crowds about Jesus. He performed many great wonders and miracles in Jesus’ name. His words touched people’s hearts so that they believed in Jesus and were baptized. Some Jews who did not believe in Jesus came from the synagogues to debate Stephen. But no matter what they said, Stephen’s wisdom overcame all of their arguments. And so they dragged Stephen to the Sanhedrin and told lies and made false accusations against him.

Fearlessly, Stephen stood before the Sanhedrin and proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, whom the judges and priests had betrayed out of the hardness of their hearts. All those in the Sanhedrin were furious at his words.

Suddenly, the heavens opened, and Stephen looked up. There shone the glory of God the Father, at whose right hand stood Jesus! Stephen proclaimed, “Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this, the Jews covered their ears, rushed at Stephen, and cast him out of the city walls to stone him. Those present took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a man named Saul. Later, Saul would become Paul, the great Apostle who spread the Good News of Jesus throughout the world. But his heart had not yet seen the truth about Jesus, and he persecuted Christians.

As Stephen was being stoned, he cried out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And then he fell on his knees and forgave those who were stoning him, crying out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Then, Stephen became the first glorious martyr to die for Christ. St. Stephen, help me fearlessly proclaim that Jesus is the Savior of the world!