

# DECEMBER

CELEBRATING THE SEASONS

TUESDAY 26TH DECEMBER

## Saint Stephen, Deacon and First Martyr

Saint Stephen, is the first Christian martyr. All we know about Saint Stephen comes from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 6–7. His name is of Greek origin, suggesting that he was a Hellenistic Jew. Nothing else is known about Stephen's early life. Stephen came on the scene within the early Church in Jerusalem, where he was chosen as a deacon to assist with the fair distribution of daily provisions within the Christian community.

As a deacon, Stephen also preached the Word of God and performed many miracles. Various Hellenistic Jews even debated him in public, “but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke” (Acts 6:10). This so agitated them that they dragged him before the Sanhedrin, just as they had done to Jesus. The Sanhedrin was the highest religious, judicial, and legislative body within the Jewish community. The charges brought against Stephen were that he spoke against the Temple and the Law of Moses. As Stephen stood before the angry Sanhedrin, his face appeared like that of an angel. Acts 7:1–53 presents a lengthy speech Stephen made before the Sanhedrin. It is one of the longest and most significant speeches in the New Testament. His accusers were so infuriated that they immediately dragged him outside the city (probably the northern gate) and stoned him to death. This horrible situation, however, turned truly beautiful and glorious on account of Stephen's faith. Before being dragged to the spot of his death, he looked up to Heaven and exclaimed, “Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God”



WEDNESDAY 27TH DECEMBER

## Saint John, Apostle and Evangelist

Saint John the Apostle stands out from the other Apostles in many ways. He is believed to be the author of the Gospel of Saint John, three letters in the New Testament—John 1, 2, 3—and the Book of Revelation. In the Gospel attributed to him, he refers to himself not as “John,” but as “the one whom Jesus loved” (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7). Tradition holds that he outlived the other Apostles, dying around the year 101. He is the only Apostle who died of natural causes rather than martyrdom. His writing style is mystical, reflective, and contemplative, and he includes rich symbolism. His Gospel and letters focus upon divine love and the intimacy to which we are called to love and be loved by God.

Though there is no reliable documentation about where John traveled and ministered, most scholars believe that he and the Blessed Virgin Mary moved to Ephesus, in modern-day Turkey, and John spent the rest of his life caring for her and ministering throughout Asia Minor, which made up what is today western Turkey. This belief is especially based on the letters mentioned in the Book of Revelation that were written to seven churches he most likely helped establish.



THURSDAY 28TH DECEMBER

## Feast of the Holy Innocents

“When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi” (Matthew 2:16). According to the early liturgies of the Eastern Churches, between 14,000 and 144,000 boys were massacred. However, those high numbers might only be symbolic. Given the fact that Bethlehem was a small town, possibly with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, the number of boys under the age of two might have been closer to a couple of dozen. One legend states that Herod even killed one of his own sons at that time. The same legend continues that when the Roman Emperor Augustus heard of the act, he stated, “It is better to be Herod's pig than son.”

Regardless of the actual number of boys killed, they are now honored as the first martyrs for Christ. The early deacon Saint Stephen, whose feast we celebrated two days ago, still retains the title of the first Christian martyr, given his baptism. But these children were the first to die on account of Christ. Of these infants, Saint Augustine said, “Herod accordingly kills many little children, in his determination to bring about the death of just one. And while he carried out this most celebrated and cruel slaughter of so many innocents, he was himself the first one he slew by such an utterly wicked deed” (Sermon 373).



# DECEMBER

## LECTIONARY READINGS

- Friday, December 1 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Zechariah 14:1-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18
- Saturday, December 2 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; Micah 2:1-13; Matthew 24:15-31

### Sunday, December 3rd : First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9 • Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 • 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 • Mark 13:24-37

- Monday, December 4 Psalm 79; Micah 4:1-5; Revelation 15:1-8
- Tuesday, December 5 Psalm 79; Micah 4:6-13; Revelation 18:1-10
- Wednesday, December 6 Psalm 79; Micah 5:1-5a; Luke 21:34-38
- Thursday, December 7 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Hosea 6:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10
- Friday, December 8 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Jeremiah 1:4-10; Acts 11:19-26
- Saturday, December 9 Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28; Mark 11:27-33

### Sunday, December 10th : Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11 • Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 • 2 Peter 3:8-15a • Mark 1:1-8

- Monday, December 11 Psalm 27; Isaiah 26:7-15; Acts 2:37-42
- Tuesday, December 12 Psalm 27; Isaiah 4:2-6; Acts 11:1-18
- Wednesday, December 13 Psalm 27; Malachi 2:10-3:1; Luke 1:5-17
- Thursday, December 14 Psalm 126; Habakkuk 2:1-5; Philippians 3:7-11
- Friday, December 15 Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:2-6; Philippians 3:12-16
- Saturday, December 16 Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:13-19; Matthew 21:28-32

### Sunday, December 17th : Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 • Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46b-55 • 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 • John 1:6-8, 19-28

- Monday, December 18 Psalm 125; 1 Kings 18:1-18; Ephesians 6:10-17
- Tuesday, December 19 Psalm 125; 2 Kings 2:9-22; Acts 3:17-4:4
- Wednesday, December 20 Psalm 125; Malachi 3:16-4:6; Mark 9:9-13
- Thursday, December 21 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:1-11; Hebrews 1:1-4
- Friday, December 22 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:12-19; Hebrews 1:5-14
- Saturday, December 23 Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Judges 13:2-24; John 7:40-52

### Sunday, December 24th : Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 • Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 • Romans 16:25-27 • Luke 1:26-38

- Monday, December 25 Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:1-18; Hebrews 9:1-14
- Tuesday, December 26 Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:19-28; Hebrews 8:1-13
- Wednesday, December 27 Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Mark 11:1-11
- Thursday, December 28 Psalm 148; Jeremiah 31:15-17; Matthew 2:13-18
- Friday, December 29 Psalm 148; Isaiah 49:5-15; Matthew 12:46-50
- Saturday, December 30 Psalm 148; Proverbs 9:1-12; 2 Peter 3:8-13

### Sunday, December 31st : First Sunday after Christmas Day

Isaiah 61:10-62:3 • Psalm 148 • Galatians 4:4-7 • Luke 2:22-40