



**The Holy First Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates on December 27.**

Saint Stephen was a Jew by race, and, as some say, a disciple of Gamaliel, the teacher of the Law mentioned in Acts 5:34 and 22:3. He was the first of the seven deacons whom the Apostles established in Jerusalem to care for the poor and to distribute alms to them. Being a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, he performed great signs and wonders among the people. While disputing with the Jews concerning Jesus, and wisely refuting their every contradiction, so that no one was able to withstand the wisdom and spirit whereby he spake, he was slandered as a blasphemer and dragged off to the Sanhedrin of the elders. There with boldness he proved from the divine Scriptures the coming of the Just One (Jesus), of Whom they had become the betrayers and murderers, and he reproved their faithlessness and hardheartedness. And finally, gazing into Heaven and beholding the divine glory, he said: "Lo, I see the Heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But when they heard this, they stopped their ears, and with anger cast him out of the city and stoned him, while he was calling out and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then, imitating the long-suffering of the Master, he bent his knees and prayed in a loud voice for them that were stoning him, and he said, "Lord lay not this sin to their charge." And saying this, he fell asleep (Acts 6, 7), thus becoming the first among the Martyrs of the Church of Christ.

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Dismissal Hymn of the Martyr. Fourth Tone
Be quick to anticipate

THE crown of the Kingdom hath adorned the brow of thy head * because of the contests that thou hast endured for Christ God, thou first of the martyred Saints; * for when thou hast censured the Jews' madness, thou sawest * Christ thy Saviour standing at the right hand of the Father. * O Stephen, ever pray Him for us, that He would save our souls.

Kontakion of the Martyr. Third Tone
On this day the Virgin

YESTERDAY the Master came, * to be with us in the body; * and today His faithful slave * departeth out of the body; * yesterday the King was born * in the flesh for our sakes; and today the servant suffereth death by stoning; * for His sake is perfected * the first of Martyrs, * Stephen the truly divine.



Saint Stephen's (Lions) Gate in Jerusalem
This is the place where Saint Stephen was martyred.

OIKOS

STEPHEN the First Martyr hath shone out like a luminous star jointly with the Nativity of Christ, flashing brightly and enlightening all the uttermost regions of the earth. Singlehanded, he brought to nought all the impiety of the Jews, reproving them with words of wisdom, reasoning with them from the Scriptures; and persuading them that Jesus, Who was born of a Virgin, is the very Son of God, he put to shame their impious villainy, even the first of Martyrs, Stephen the truly divine.

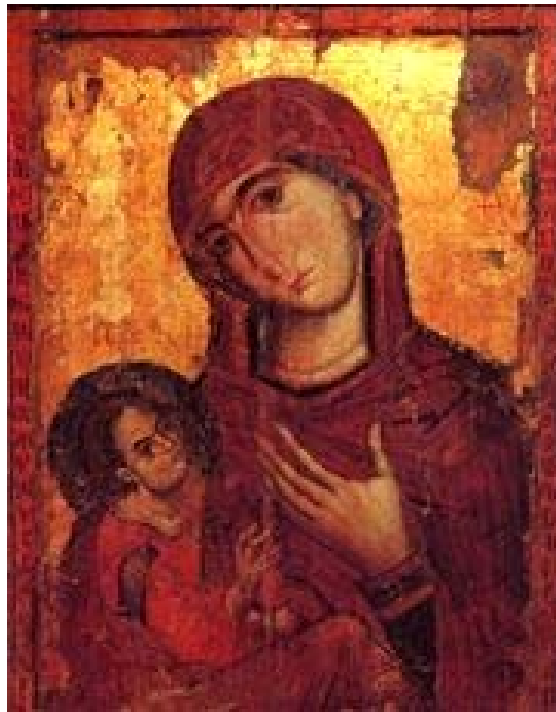
SYNAXARION

On the twenty-seventh of this month we commemorate the holy Apostle and First Martyr and Archdeacon Stephen, one of the Seven Deacons.

Verses

With crowns of words, as it were with stones most precious,
I now crown Stephen, whom the stones crowned beforetime.

On the twenty-seventh a stony destiny took Stephen away.



† THE MOTHER OF GOD OF SINAI