

St Stephen



This week we are learning about St Stephen as part of our learning on the work of the apostles.

Saint Stephen was born around the beginning of the Christian calendar. The name Stephen derives from the Greek word 'stephanos', meaning 'crown'. You may see pictures of Saint Stephen with stones encircling his head to symbolise the way in which he died.



After Jesus died, the apostles were made aware that some of the community were not being looked after as well as they could be. The apostles decided to ordain seven deacons to ensure that everyone's needs were being met.

Stephen was appointed as one of these deacons, and, being the eldest, he was made the archdeacon. Stephen was chosen because he was known to be trustworthy and wise.

Saint Stephen was an excellent preacher and many people who listened to him became followers of Jesus. Unfortunately, some people were not happy about how successful Saint Stephen was in his role. These people became enemies of Stephen and decided to try to sabotage his work by inventing false stories about him.

Stephen's enemies debated with him in order to collect evidence that they could use to persecute him. They asked others to lie about Stephen, saying that he had spoken unkindly about God and Moses; saying insulting things about religious people or things is called blasphemy.

Stephen was accused of blasphemy and had to face trial. He was executed by being stoned to death and is now known as a martyr because he died for his religious beliefs. Saint Stephen is the patron saint of deacons.



Acts 7:54-60

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Watch the story of Stephen to recap what you have learnt so far.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5nGHmH6PeA>



Task

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord do not hold this sin against them.’

1. In your own words, describe the challenges Stephen faced when he was a deacon.
2. Why was Stephen stoned to death?
3. What do you think Stephen would have been thinking and feeling as he was stoned?
4. How did Stephen’s actions and words show faithfulness?
5. Stephen was the first martyr - what is the definition of the word martyr?
6. Why do you think Stephen has remained an important figure in the Christian Church? Explain your answer.