



# Saint Stephen

## The Very First Martyr

By: Katrine Attia

St Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, Charlotte, NC

**O**ur knowledge of St Stephen's life is attained solely from chapters six and seven in the Holy Book of Acts. Yet, innumerable lessons about grace and power can be learned from the story of the first of God's children who willingly opted to die rather than to forsake his faith.

**"Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,"** St Stephen was chosen and appointed as one of the seven in the early church in Jerusalem to aid in church administration, prominently in the daily ministration and assistance of widows. His life previous to this appointment remains almost entirely in the dark.

**After his appointment, he was distinguished for** "doing great wonders and miracles among the people" (Acts 6:8). Some Jewish men, being able "to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:10), stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes against him, seized him, and brought him before the council and the high priest in Jerusalem, where false witnesses accused him of blasphemy. All who sat in the council "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15).

**With refinement, St Stephen** defended the Christian faith in his powerful sermon before the council where he testified that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Messiah and fulfilled the ancient prophecies. He denounced the Jews as "betrayers and murderers" of God's Son, the Just One and called them "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears", who "always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51-

52). Enraged, the members of the council, "gnashed on him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54).

**He proceeded by telling them that he saw the** heavens opened, and the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God. They reacted by casting him out of Jerusalem and stoning him (Acts 7:55-58). In his last words, St Stephen resembling the love of the Lord Jesus Christ at the time of Crucifixion prayed, "God lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60).

**It is presumed and impossible to deny that the** deeper meaning of St Stephen's story does in fact confront us with the very extremity we might seek to avoid-standing amongst the increasing murmurs and rumblings of a relentless crowd, might we too willingly give our lives for the sake of our Lord's love for us and our love for Him? We may or may not ever be

brought to this actual test because in the depth of our souls, the Spirit is always there, telling us that it could be so. With this conviction comes the inexhaustible, even if quiet strength, that we are capable of doing so much good in the world. It also conveys to us a definite direction, which is to do everything in our means to make the way to salvation, through our actions, perceivable for all who seek it.

**May the commitment and vision** from God that led St Stephen to his glorious martyrdom, be the measure of our own faith and the establishment for our own spiritual journey- whether we do or do not die under the actual stones of our oppressors.



*St Stephen. Coptic Church of the Virgin  
"By Babylon of the Steps."*