**St Stephen**

**OUR PATRON SAINT**

![The sermon of St Stephen, Vittore Carpaccio (1514)](image)

**STEPHEN** was a member of the first community of Christians, living in Jerusalem in the first few years after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. Stephen, along with six other members of the community, was appointed to serve at the community meal, to make sure that vulnerable people in the community were receiving enough to eat. In this way, Stephen’s story encourages us to remember the vulnerable, especially in matters related to food security. Because Stephen was not an Israelite, but a Hellenistic convert to the Way of Jesus, he was also discriminated against by members of the community who assumed an ethnic superiority over him. In this way, Stephen’s story reminds us that part of our mission is to be on guard for the ways that we perpetuate division and discrimination in our own communities. When hostility against Stephen escalated to violence, his passionate defense of God’s principles, and the bold truth he spoke to leaders of the synagogue revealed his wisdom and the depth of his knowledge of Scripture. In this way, Stephen’s story calls us to be mindful of God’s activity in history, and to be aware of our place in it, so that we can tell the story of God’s salvation and speak the truth in love. Finally, Stephen’s accusers murdered him in a fit of rage. But praying for his killers, Stephen called on the name of Jesus, and died with mercy in his heart and on his lips. In this way, Stephen’s story reminds us that the way of Jesus is the way of forgiveness, even for enemies and those who would harm us. (Stephen’s full story can be found in the New Testament book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 6 & 7.)

**THE FEAST OF ST STEPHEN.** Feast days are special days in the church’s life of worship that honor particular events in the life of Jesus, or particular people from the Bible or from history. Because our church is named after St Stephen, we take time to celebrate his feast day every year. According to tradition, the feast of Stephen is December 26, which basically means that it never gets celebrated. Some years ago, the congregation of St Stephen’s asked our bishop if it would be okay to move the celebration of St Stephen’s day to the second Sunday in September, when we also mark the beginning of our church program year.