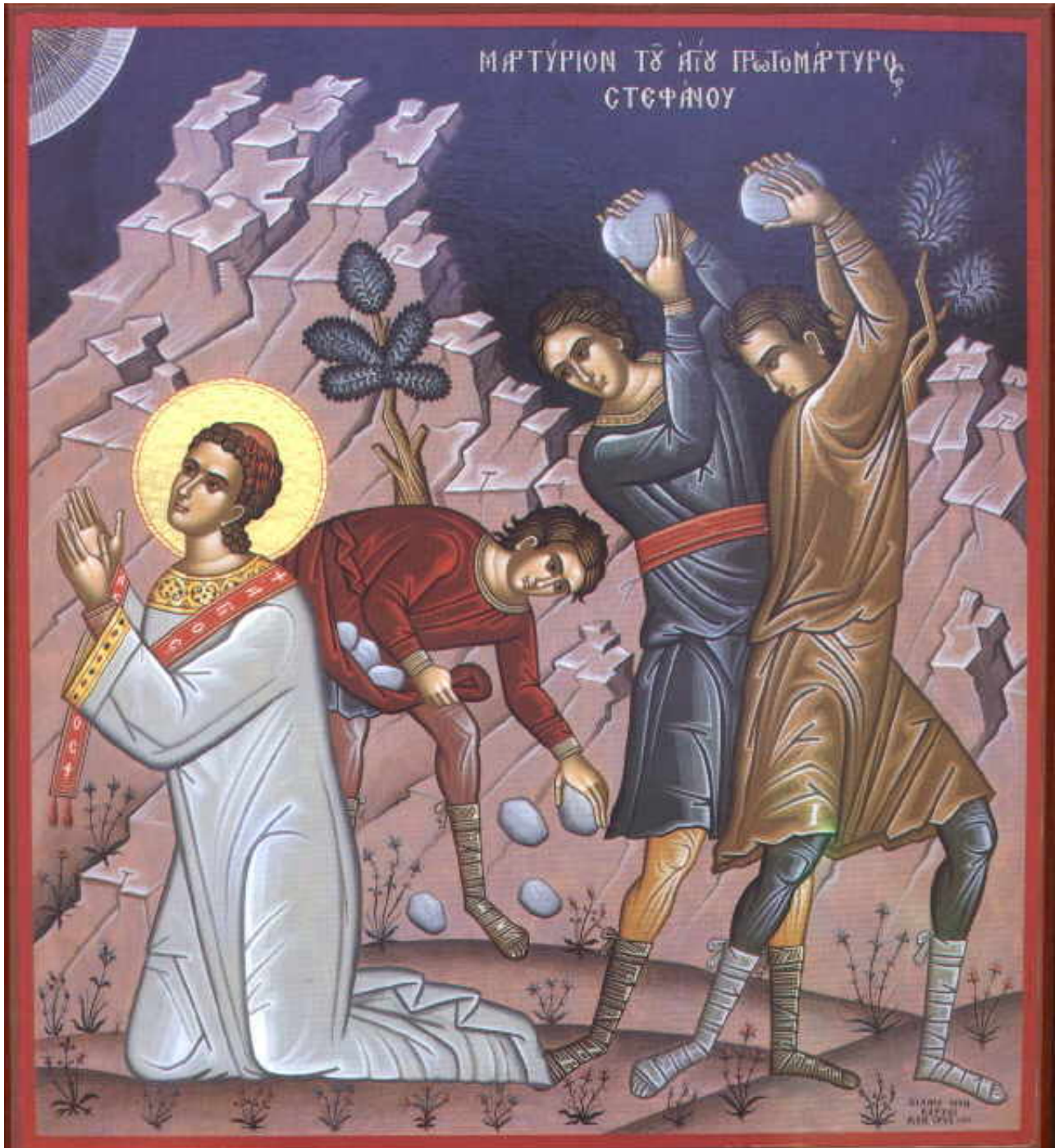


Feast of Saint Stephen's martyrdom in Bulgarian Orthodox Church / Saint Stephen the first Christian Saint

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It is 27th of December, the *3rd day of Christmas* and in those day in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church we co-memorate saint Stephen's Martyrdom.

It's a well known fact that by his martyrdom **Saint Stephen** became the **first Christian martyr**. Stephen's name etymology comes from Greek (Stephanos) and translated means "*Crown*".

What we know from Orthodox Church's tradition is that Stephen was a very young in his age of Martyrdom probably in his 20s.

Stephen's glorious martyrdom has inspired and strengthened significantly the early severely hunted Church and has given a lot of courage and faith to many of our early Saint Martyrs. These early Church saints now incessantly pray to God to have mercy on our earthly Church.

It's not much known fact St. Stephen held a rank in the early Church clergy, he was a **Hierodeacon**. Hierodeaconism in our church is considered the maximum rank of deaconship one can have just before he is ordained for a Priest.



St. Stephen was burning for love in Christ and had a strong faith in God, turning many Jewish to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He has shown the truth way to many by teaching them, how to properly interpret the Old Testament (Ancient Jewish) writings.

He explained to many Jewish, how all the old scriptures testify about the coming of the Messiah (Christ), which will save all who believe in his name from sins hell damnation.

As Jewish looked for ways to shutter any kind of preaching of the Gospel and kill Christianity, they saw Stephen as a big enemy just like all Christians in those early days. Therefore they looked for ways to accuse him and execute them and end up the large numbers of Jewish people converting from Judaism to Christianity.

The whole story of stoning (execution) of st. Stephen is described in the Holy Scriptures in the book called **Acts of the Apostles**

As he was about to die, Stephen looked up to heaven and said;

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."

Then, as he was being stoned, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Our Beloved saints last words were, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." manifesting his saintship and deep Christ love even during his last moments of earthly living.

St. Stephen is celebrated in almost all West Roman Catholic Church and in Anglicans.

Churches who co-mmemorate the great saint are located in all around the world.

St. Stephen is also considered a patron saint of **Republika Sprska (Bosnia and Herzegovina)**

Stephen's name later probably become the origin name for western's so popular Steven name).



Saint Stephen's Byzantine Icon from the 11th Century

Let by the Holy Prayers of St. Stephen God have mercy on the Church and increase our faith and mercies
to us sinners.