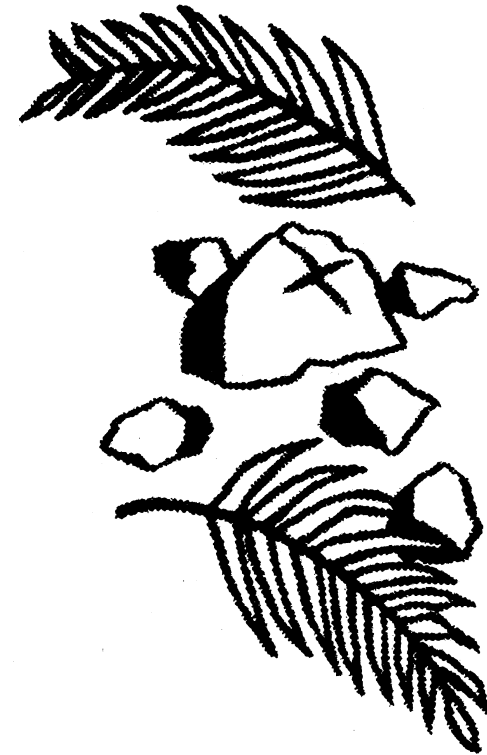




FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

VANCOUVER, BC | EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA



ST. STEPHEN, DEACON AND MARTYR
DECEMBER 26, 2010

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A SPOKEN SERVICE

Worshippers may wish to light a votive candle in memory of a loved one or for meditation. This may be done at any time before or during the liturgy except during community prayers, readings or homily. Since the number of candles is limited and to avoid mishaps, parents and caregivers are asked to be attentive when allowing children to light one.

INTRODUCTION

The joy of Christmas is juxtaposed with the harsh realities of the world as we commemorate St. Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Having heard the angels sing of peace to God's people on earth at the birth of Christ, we now hear of Stephen being stoned to death. Even as we continue to celebrate the birth of Christ during the twelve days of Christmas, today we mark Stephen's birth into eternal life. Nourished by Christ's body and blood, we pray that we would also forgive our enemies as did Jesus and Stephen, and thus witness to a love that is stronger than death.

PRELUDE

Adagio (Sonata No.1)
Vom Himmel Hoch

Felix Mendelssohn
Flor Peeters

GATHERING

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING HYMN

Congregation's choice

GREETING

Good news of great joy, light and life, grace and peace be with you all. **And also with you.**

SALUTATION AND PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. Grant us grace, O Lord, that like Stephen we may learn to love even our enemies and seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

WORD

FIRST READING: 2 Chronicles 24:17-22

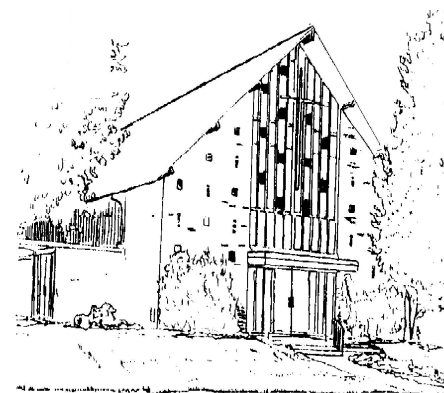
In this reading, a chief's son, Zechariah, is stoned in the temple for testifying that the people had abandoned God. This story serves both as a parallel to the martyrdom of Stephen and as a reminder that actions have consequences, and that God cares how people act.

Now after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king listened to them. ¹⁸They abandoned the house of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and served the sacred poles and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. ¹⁹Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord; they testified against them, but they would not listen.

First Lutheran Church is a member of the British Columbia Synod (one of five regions) which make up the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) which in turn belongs to the Lutheran World Federation which represents the 80 million Lutherans around the world. For more information on the ministries of the ELCIC (office in Winnipeg, Manitoba), visit its website at www.elcic.ca. For similar information on the BC synod, visit its office in New Westminster or its website at www.bcsynod.org.

Financial support of our congregation's life and mission is provided by the donations of our members given in thankful response to the generosity shown by God in the gifts given to us. Offerings of any amount are gratefully accepted and joyfully spent in our service to Christ and to others.

Have you remembered First Lutheran in your will? Consider how a bequest or gift might continue supporting our mission and ministry.





It is Christ himself who invites all the baptized members of God's family — and all our guests — to come to his table where he gives his body and blood, along with the gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation under the forms of bread and wine. After receiving the wafer into the open, upraised palm, all may drink from the first (common) cup instinct (dip) the wafer into the second (intinction) cup.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE SUPPER

MUSIC DURING THE MEAL

HYMN *Congregation's choice*
That Boy—Child of Mary Malawi Traditional

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Let us pray. Great and gracious God, **we thank you that in this holy meal the true Light has come to dwell in us. As we return into the world you love, may we take to all people the good news of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

BLESSING

Holy Incarnate Majesty, Holy Incarnate Word, Holy Abiding Spirit, one God, + bless you now and forever. **Amen**

SENDING SONG

Congregation's choice

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Share the good news. **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE

Noel

Marc-Antoine Charpentier

Sunday School Time Change

Sunday school will start again on January 9 **at 9:45 am.** All children aged 6 to 12 are welcome. We will start at 9:45 am to accommodate various needs. Thank you.

Next Sunday, January 2

Joint Epiphany Worship
 with St. Thomas Anglican
10:00 am at St. Thomas
 (3 blocks west of Wales on 41st Avenue)
*Please bring food to share in the
 potluck lunch.*

²⁰Then the spirit of God took possession of Zechariah son of the priest Jehoiada; he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus says God: Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has also forsaken you." ²¹But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the Lord. ²²King Joash did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. As he was dying, he said, "May the Lord see and avenge!"

Response after the reading:

Thanks be to God.

LESSON HYMN

Congregation's Choice

SECOND READING: Acts 6:8--7:2a, 51-60

The Christian community is growing rapidly. Even priests, along with Jews from all sorts of backgrounds, have joined the group of disciples. But as the community grows, so does the opposition, which now becomes violent. Listen as Stephen echoes Jesus' prayer of forgiveness for his opponents.

Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. ¹¹Then they secretly instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹²They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. ¹³They set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us." ¹⁵And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. ^{7:1}Then the high priest asked him, "Are these things so?" ^{2a}And Stephen replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me.

⁵¹"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. ⁵²Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. ⁵³You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it."

⁵⁴When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. ⁵⁵But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶"Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

Response after the reading:

Thanks be to God.

SEQUENCE HYMN

Congregation's Choice

GOSPEL: Matthew 23:34-39

Matthew 23 is a polemic aimed at the religious leaders of Jesus' day. This passage is one of the most radical, accusing the "scribes and Pharisees" (vs. 29) of murdering God's messengers. The picture of the Pharisees is one-sided and therefore misleading, but it shows Matthew's concern that all come to repentance.

*Response after announcement: **Glory to you, O God***

Jesus said: ³⁴"Therefore I send you prophets, sages, and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, ³⁵so that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. ³⁶Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation.

³⁷"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁸See, your house is left to you, desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

Response to conclusion of reading: Praise to you, O Christ.

HOMILY *(Silence follows for reflection)*

HYMN OF THE DAY

#274 "On Christmas Night"

THE PRAYERS

Gathered in the joy of promises fulfilled, let us bring our needs and our thanksgivings to God.
A brief silence.

Let your holy church follow in the steps of Stephen, who held fast to his faith in Christ Jesus, even in the face of death. God of grace and peace, **hear our prayer.**

Let justice prevail in the legal systems of all nations, that all who are falsely accused may be released, and all who are guilty may be treated with human dignity.
God of grace and peace, **hear our prayer.**

Let those who are persecuted for their faith be granted freedom to worship and to serve without fear or hindrance. God of grace and peace, **hear our prayer.**

Let your people continue to care for those who are weak and in need, following the example of Stephen and the other deacons. Give hope to all who are ill or in special need (*especially*).
God of grace and peace, **hear our prayer.**

Let the children and youth of this congregation be inspired by the witness of Stephen, that when confronted with challenges and choices, they are guided by their love for you.
God of grace and peace, **hear our prayer.**

Let all who dwell in God's presence join in proclaiming the glory of God. We give thanks for Stephen, *and*. . .and all the faithful ones who now rest from their labors. God of grace and peace, **hear our prayer.**

Hear all our prayers, gracious God, and receive them in the name of the Word made flesh, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

SHARING OF THE PEACE

OFFERING/OFFERTORY

King Jesus Is His Name

arr. Jack Schraeder

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. Good and loving God, **we rejoice in the birth of Jesus, who came among the poor to bring the riches of your grace. Bless the gifts we offer this day, and let them be blessing for others. With the trees of the field, with all earth and heaven, we shout for joy at the coming of your Son. Amen**

MEAL

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

EUCHARISTIC PRAYER (Prayer over the gifts of bread and wine)

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

FRACTION

The gifts of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Come to Bethlehem, the house of bread. Receive the living God.