

St. Stephen



Jesus had gone up to heaven. The Holy Spirit had come to the apostles to help to spread the Good News. Every day more and more people came to them wishing to become followers of Christ. They formed a community where everyone helped each other. The apostles were very busy teaching and caring for the people. They needed help, particularly to serve each day's food supply.

"Let us appoint seven helpers to work in the community." Everyone was pleased with the idea.

"Stephen, Philip, Porchours, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and

Nicolaus have been chosen," the apostles announced. Then they put their hands on each one of the seven and said prayers for them. The seven did their work well.

Stephen was blessed by God in a special way. He performed many miracles. He was also a very good speaker and teacher. His old friends who were not Christians started arguing with him. But Stephen spoke so well about God and Jesus that his old friends were jealous. They decided to get Stephen into a lot of trouble. They paid some men to tell the Jewish Council that Stephen said wrong things about God and Moses.

Stephen was arrested and put on trial. The false witnesses told their lies and the Council members got angry at Stephen. When it was Stephen's turn to speak, he told the truth. But the Council was afraid of Stephen because he was so holy and blessed by God. They took Stephen out of the city and had him stoned to death. It was a terrible way to die! But Stephen loved Jesus so much he would not save himself by turning against Jesus. Instead, Stephen began to pray. "Lord Jesus, take my spirit." And then he knelt down and said, "Lord! Do not remember this sin against these men who are killing me!" and he died.

Stephen became the first martyr. (A martyr is someone who is killed because he or she will not give up believing in Jesus.) After Stephen's death, the Council and other leaders of the land of Judea tried to wipe out Christianity by killing the followers of Christ. Christians had to hide their religion to keep from being killed. Many were killed, but many more became followers of Jesus. The persecutors could not stop Christianity from growing and spreading all over the world!

Our church still remembers Stephen. We call him the protomartyr. He is a saint whom we mention every Sunday in church. He is the patron saint of all altar servers, especially the deacons!

The Priest:

Of the Mother of God the holy virgin Mary, and of John the Baptist, of the protomartyr Stephen, and of all the saints, to be mindful in this holy sacrifice we beseech the Lord.

Hi! My name is Joseph. As you can see, I'm a deacon. This is the *shabig* (robe) I wear when serving in the church. This long piece of material I wear over my shoulder is called a stole. The *shabig* is like my uniform and the stole tells my rank. It means I am allowed to do certain things in the service because I have participated in the sacrament of ordination to become a sub-deacon.

When I was a little boy about your age, I used to love to watch the altar servers. I used to think how nice it would be to hold a candle or do the poorvar (cense). When I got a little older, I asked my priest if I could become an acolyte. He said I could if I came to church every Sunday one hour before church started to take lessons from the deacon. I agreed and started to learn what I had to do. It was more than just holding a candle and standing still! I had to learn what the Divine Liturgy was all about and how it went so that I would know when to do what!

Little by little I learned how to hold the candle properly. Then I learned to say some of the psalms. I listened carefully and tried to memorize what the choir sang, what the deacon said, and what the priest said. I received the four minor orders and took turns with the other acolytes serving at the altar each week. When I was about 14, I started learning the sub-deacon's job. When I was 17 years old, I was ordained a sub-deacon.

Now I am allowed to read the Gospel, do the poorvar, light candles and care for the church, sing the litanies, bring the Gospel book around the altar, bring the wine and bread to the altar, and direct the worshippers. I can assist with most of the sacraments. And I even help train new acolytes!

I always loved being part of the worship service. The badarak is still my favorite



service, but I had to learn other services too. The morning service is a nice, quiet service that I try to be in church for each Sunday. The services during Lent are sort of sad, but they are very special in their own way too. Sometimes I help the priest at a funeral or a wedding or a baptism. I even go with the priest when he visits people who are sick once in a while.

I think someday I might want to become a full deacon, then maybe a priest! I pray and ask God if that is what he wants for me. One day I'll know his answer. For now, I'll continue to go to college and serve my church as a sub-deacon.

A Deacon's Job

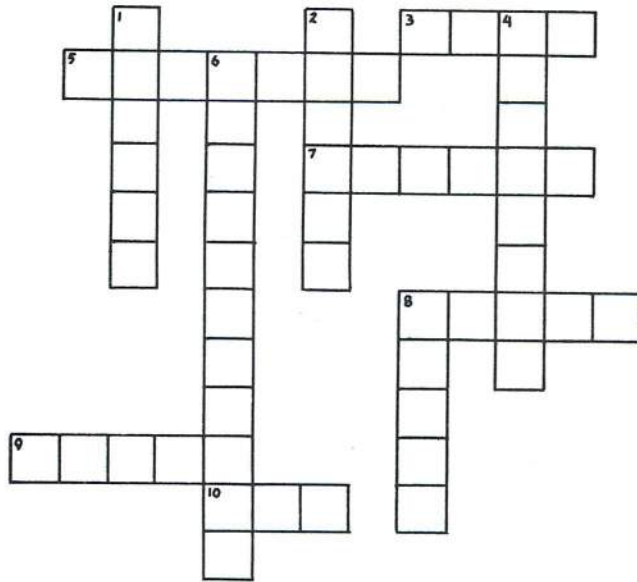
What were the jobs a deacon did in St. Stephen's time? What are the jobs a deacon does now? Put S before those jobs which deacons did in Stephen's time. Put N before those jobs which deacons do now. Put SN if the jobs were done then and are still done now.

- ___ Serve the Christian community.
- ___ Do poorvar (cense).
- ___ Tell others about Jesus.
- ___ Teach others.
- ___ Direct the worshippers.
- ___ Help the apostles.

deacon
SARGAVAK
սարկաւակ



St. Stephen
SOORP SDEPANOS
Սուրբ Ստեփանոս



Across

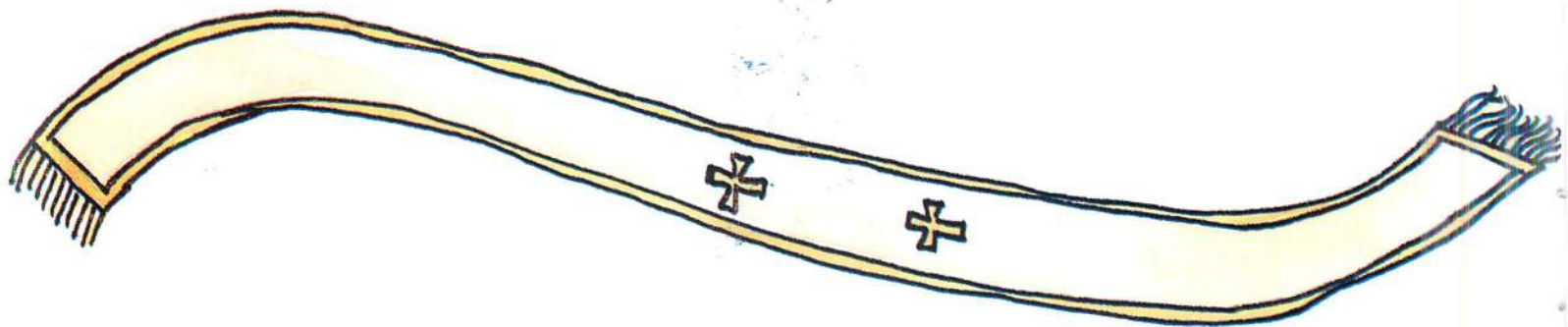
3. When we ____ we talk to God.
5. ____ was the first deacon.
7. Jesus ____ started Christianity.
8. Stephen could ____ well.
9. Stephen was the ____ martyr.
10. Stephen said ____ to God.

Down

1. Stephen was ____ to death for believing in Jesus.
2. The apostles made him a ____ to help serve the Christian community.
4. The ____ put their hands on Stephen to make him a deacon.
6. Because Stephen was the first person to die for believing in Jesus, he is called the ____ .
8. Stephen's job as deacon was to ____ .

Stephen's Stole: Stephen was a very special person. In this list are some of the words that could describe Stephen. Write the words *you* think describe Stephen on the picture of a stole.

bossy helpful trusting loving loyal brave afraid happy
forgiving martyr prayerful



(Read pages 90-94 by turns.) Discussion questions for "Suzy Asks for Help":

Who needed help? Who helped her? Why did Suzy ask mother to help her. Couldn't she talk to dad just as well?

Say: "You know many saints already. Some of them were mentioned at the beginning of our lesson. Try to find a saint you like and when you pray, ask that saint to intercede for you with God." (20 min.)
3. Say: "Now let's use this cellophane! Look at the activity in your text. We'll follow the directions on pages 94 and 95 and see what we'll make." (20 min.)
4. *Homework*: "Each night this week when you say your bedtime prayers, I want you to ask your favorite saint to intercede for you. When you come back next week, I will ask you which saint you prayed to as your intercessor."

Closing prayer: Light of the world, Jesus Christ, let your light shine in us and through us. Help us to come to your perfect light one day. Amen. (5 min.)

Extending the Lesson

Look in Divine Liturgy books for instances when we ask the saints to intercede for us. Make up your own intercessory prayers.

Visit church and take special note of the stained glass windows.

Read from *Saints for Children*.

Make a list of all the saints the class knows—tell about each one.

At one time, children were named for saints and celebrated their name day instead of their birthdays. Who in the class is named for a saint? When is that saint's day? (Consult an Oratooytz.) If children are not named after saints, they can "adopt" one—draw up "official papers."

Session 2—Saint Stephen

Key Concepts

1. St. Stephen was called to respond to God's gift of love and became the first deacon of the Church.
2. St. Stephen stood up for Jesus, for what he knew was true, for what he believed, even when falsely accused by the Jewish leaders and stoned to death as punishment for not relinquishing his faith.
3. We call on St. Stephen as the first martyr to intercede for us when we pray in our liturgy and in our personal prayers.

Objectives

Students will

1. Read a brief story about St. Stephen and do a crossword puzzle reviewing story facts.
2. Compare the functions of the early deacons with

the deacon's job today.

3. Discuss the special qualities of St. Stephen.
4. Underline St. Stephen's name in a litany in the Divine Liturgy.

Background for Teacher

One of the seven deacons appointed to look after the daily distribution to the poor in the early Church (Acts 6:1-6), was Stephen who is described as a "man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Stephen taught in the synagogue of freedmen. He was accused of blasphemy and Acts 7 records his remarkable defense of the faith (called in theological terms an apology). At the close of his speech, he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." This is the only time the title "Son of Man" is used by anyone other than Jesus himself in the New Testament.

Such radical thinking was too much for the council of men (called the Sanhedrin). They prescribed the usual form of capital punishment by Hebrew law for the offense of blasphemy: death by stoning.

Stephen was the first martyr of the Church for witnessing (standing up and being counted for your beliefs).

Resources

The Sacraments: The Symbols of Our Faith, The Four Minor Orders of the Armenian Church

Materials Needed

- A deacon's robe and stole
- Pencils
- Divine Liturgy books

Procedure

Have a robe and stole for a deacon on display. If possible, have a deacon from church present and in his vestments. Later you can have the children ask the deacon questions.

1. As the children enter, briefly check homework and tell them they can look at the robe and stole, and try them on, until you are ready.

Opening prayer: Hayr Mer. (5 min.)

2. Say: "Can you guess from the items on display what the job of the person in our story today is? Today's story is about the first deacon of the Church. His name was Stephen. As we read the story, look and listen to find out what happened to Stephen and why." (Read aloud from pages 96 and 97 by turns.)

Questions for discussion:

- Why did the church need deacons? (To help take care of the people.)
- Who was the first and best deacon of the original seven? (Stephen.)
- Why was he so special? (He could speak well and teach.)

- Why was Stephen put on trial? (Because his friends were jealous, because he was Christian, etc.)
- What was Stephen's punishment? (Stoning.)
- Did killing Stephen stop people from becoming Christians? (No.)
- How do you think Stephen felt about being chosen to be a deacon? (Proud.)
- How did Stephen feel about those who stoned him? (He forgave them.) (20 min.)

3. Continue: "Now let's read a story about a modern day deacon. Look and listen for how a deacon of today is different from Stephen." (Read aloud "Hi, my name is Joseph . . .", by turns.)

Questions for discussion:

- Who makes a deacon a deacon today? (Bishop.)
- Who made Stephen a deacon? (Apostles.)
- What does a deacon do today? (Helps the priest in church.)
- What did Stephen do? (Helped take care of the community's needs.)
- Do both deacons still serve at the table of the Lord? (Yes.)
- Did Stephen teach people about Jesus? (Yes.)
- Do deacons become priests? (Not always.)
- What kind of deacon would you choose to be and why? (10 min.)

4. Do the "Stephen" crossword puzzle as a way of reviewing the story. (Answers: *Across* 3. pray, 5. Stephen, 7. Christ, 8. speak, 9. first, 10. yes. *Down* 1. stoned, 2. deacon, 4. apostles, 6. protomartyr, 8. serve.) (10 min.)

5. Now look with children at litanies on page 31a of the Divine Liturgy book. Then say: "What has happened in the liturgy is: The bread and wine have been transformed by the Holy Spirit into the body and blood of the Lord during the singing of Vortee Asdoodzo. We have sung a hymn to the Father, a hymn to praise and thank God, a hymn to the Son and a hymn to the Holy Spirit. Now we start singing a litany, a list of prayers, to ask God and all the saints to remember us as we worship.

"As you can see, when we mention the saints, we first mention St. Mary, the Holy Mother of God, then St. John the Baptist, and then St. Stephen. We show his importance to our church by mentioning his name here. We also want to remember what Stephen did by mentioning his name.

"Let me see if you remember. Who was St. Stephen and what did he do?" (Answers should include that he was one of the first deacons of the church, that he helped the community by serving at the table, distributing the daily food, that he defended his beliefs even unto death.) (5 min.)

6. Have students do "A Deacon's Job" activity. Then ask them: "If you were a deacon, what part of the job would you like most? Do you think God is calling or will call you to do something special for him?" (Allow

children to express their thoughts.) "When we love someone, we want to do what he/she wants us to do. God's plan for us may not be one that will make us famous like Stephen, but it will be one that makes us happy knowing we are responding to God's love." (Answers: SN, N, SN, SN, SN, S.)

(10 min.)

7. **Homework:** Stephen's stole.

Closing prayer: Lord, make me an instrument of thy will. Amen.

Vocabulary

martyr
protomartyr
intercede, intercessor, intercessory
robe (shabig)
stole
poorvar

Session 3—St. Santookht

Key Concepts

1. St. Santookht responded to God's love by choosing to remain his follower even at the cost of her own life.
2. We too should learn to make sacrifices for Jesus.

Objectives

Students will

1. Tell the story of St. Santookht.
2. Describe Santookht's role in the conversion of Armenia.
3. State that Santookht gained everlasting life in the Kingdom of God.

Background for Teacher

Santookht was the young daughter of King Sanadrook. Armenians were pagan at this time and so was the king. They worshipped gods of fire, water, etc., much like their Persian neighbors.

When St. Thaddeus entered Armenia, many Armenians had already grown dissatisfied with their pagan religion and were interested in the God of the Jews. St. Thaddeus made a great impression on them. As Christianity was not a popular religion, meetings were kept secret. Many accepted Christ.

It is thought that Santookht started attending these meetings through a servant of hers. She might have started going to them on her own. She disguised herself and sought lessons in the teaching of Christ. As you can read from the text and from resources such as *Saints for Children from the Tradition of the Armenian Church*, *Sampler of Saints*, and *Great Stories: From the History of the Armenian Church*, the work of St. Thaddeus and the martyrdom