

HOLY TRINITY CUCKFIELD

Joyfully serving Jesus



Weekly devotions, prayers and news

Stephen, Deacon Proto Martyr

26th December 2021

They saw that his face was like the face of an angel



My dear friends,

I hope that you had a wonderful Christmas Day - whatever you did (or even didn't do!). May you have found time to contemplate the wonder of Christ's birth for you.

Today will seem bitter-sweet. From very early times the Feast of Stephen has followed the birthday of the Lord; a reminder that our Faith was founded and established on sacrifice and the blood of the holy martyrs. Many Christians experienced martyrdom in the early days of the Church, and there is still much persecution and indeed martyrdom for our brothers and sisters in many parts of the world day by day. Yet when we read the account of Stephen's trial, we see the model of our Christian discipleship. Stephen is not afraid to challenge or exhort to draw people to Jesus. When he dies as the first martyr, his imitation of the Lord's forgiveness is a profound call for us to do the same in the face of anger, ridicule or indifference.

Let us thank God for Stephen's gentle soul and wonderful example.

With love,

Michael

Church website www.holytrinitycuckfield.org

Stephen, Deacon first Martyr (26th December 2021)

9.45 Family Eucharist *(in church and online)*

Readers: Pat & Rod Montague; Intercessor: Philip Richings

Services during the week:

Wednesday: 10.30 Holy Communion (C. Worship) *(in church & online)*

Readings: 1 Kings 19: 9-13a; Matthew 10: 28-30

Next Sunday: Second Sunday of Christmas (2nd January 2022)

8.00 Holy Communion *(in church)*

9.45 Family Eucharist *(in church and online)*

For services live on Zoom: Click the blue link on the front page of the church website

The Collect for Stephen, Deacon - Proto Martyr

Gracious Father, who gave the first martyr Stephen grace to pray for those who took up stones against him: grant that in all our sufferings for the truth we may learn to love even our enemies and to seek forgiveness for those who desire our hurt, looking up to heaven to him who was crucified for us, Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Advocate who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

The Post Communion Prayer:

Merciful Lord,
We thank you for the signs of your mercy revealed in birth and death:
save us by the coming of your Son,
and give us joy in honouring your servant Stephen, first martyr of the new Israel;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Acts 7: 51-end

'You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are for ever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which 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. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.'

When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen. But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then 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. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then 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.

Galatians 2: 16b-20

yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Matthew 10: 17-22

Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

A thought

From a sermon by Fulgentius, Bishop of Ruspe (c. 500AD)

Yesterday we celebrated the birth in time of our eternal King. Today we celebrate the triumphant suffering of his soldier.

Yesterday our king, clothed in his robe of flesh, left his place in the virgin's womb and graciously visited the world. Today his soldier leaves the tabernacle of his body and goes triumphantly to heaven.

Our king, despite his exalted majesty, came in humility for our sake; yet he did not come empty-handed. He brought his soldiers a great gift that not only enriched them but also made them unconquerable in battle, for it was the gift of love, which was to bring men to share in his divinity. He gave of his bounty, yet without any loss to himself. In a marvellous way he changed into wealth the poverty of his faithful followers while remaining in full possession of his own inexhaustible riches.

And so the love that brought Christ from heaven to earth raised Stephen from earth to heaven; shown first in the king, it later shone forth in his soldier. Love was Stephen's weapon by which he gained every battle, and so won the crown signified by his name. His love of God kept him from yielding to the ferocious mob; his love for his neighbour made him pray for those who were stoning him.

Love inspired him to reprove those who erred, to make them amend; love led him to pray for those who stoned him, to save them from punishment. Strengthened by the power of his love, he overcame the raging cruelty of Saul and won his persecutor on earth as his companion in heaven. In his holy and tireless love he longed to gain by prayer those whom he could not convert by admonition. Love, indeed, is the source of all good things; it is an impregnable defence, – and the way that leads to heaven. He who walks in love can neither go astray nor be afraid: love guides him, protects him, and brings him to his journey's end.

My brothers and sisters, Christ made love the stairway that would enable all Christians to climb to heaven. Hold fast to it, therefore, in all sincerity, give one another practical proof of it, and by your progress in it, make your ascent together.

A prayer for this time of anxiety:

**God of all compassion, your love never fails.
Help us to listen to the tranquillity
of your presence within our lives,
so that we may grow in the knowledge
that your Son, Jesus Christ, walks beside us,
and your Holy Spirit comforts us
at the heart of our being;
for you are One God,
world without end. Amen**

Please remember those for whom we pray:

Immediate need: Barbara Booth, John Bernardi (priest), Maureen Griffiths, Paul Simpson, Tim Burrows, The Parker Family, Eileen Knight David Davidson, Carol Cox, Kevin Sibley

Long Term Need: Young Georgia, Young Joshua, Young Reggie, Anne Greenhill, Ros Ayling, Wendy, Ann Went, Dave Cox, Julie Sadler, Tony Burbidge, Christopher, Janet Card, George Snashall, Mary Todd, Carole Wooldridge, Kate Malby, Wendy Hibling, Yvonne Godsmark, Carla Spear, Pam Sagar,

Those in Care Homes: Alan Prebble, Stephanie Gilpin, Jill Rockey, Jean Simmons, Mary Watts, Ruth Baker, Keith Thompson,

Please remember the recently departed and their families: Paul Somers, Wendy Boys, Diana Giles

In our Book of Remembrance this week we remember 26th Doris Cutler, 27th Doreen Shrapnell, Muriel Wheeler, George Flower, 28th Ann Carr, Eileen Gerrish, 29th Peter Burrowes, Kathleen Knight, Margaret Hall, Matthew Gallagher, 30th John Fisher, Harry Grieve, Rosemarie Cruse, John Tomkins, Alan Searle, Anthony Harris, 31st Dennis Bennett, Ernest Palmer, Margaret Page, Phyllis Bowring, Florence Martin, Darryl McIlvride, John Skelton, 1st Amy Tutton, Jack Small, Ronald Lower, Vivian Stevens