



**AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY +  
FEAST OF SAINT STEPHEN, THE ARCHDEACON & FIRST MARTYR  
December 27**

**THE HYMN**

**Kontakion, Matins December 27**

*"Yesterday, the Master arrived through the flesh, and today, the servant departs from the flesh. Yesterday, the King was born in the flesh, and today the servant is stoned for His sake and dies. And we know him as the holy (divine) Protomartyr Stephen."*

**THE SERMON**

**The Source Of Life**

The Nativity of Jesus Christ does not merely represent the birth of a human being. In the person of Jesus, Christ the Messiah is incarnated. Humankind has been longing for such an event since the fall of Adam. The whole of the Old Testament sets the stage for the coming of the Messiah. Other ancient civilizations, whether in the East or the Greco-Roman world, also allude to the emergence of a Redeemer.

The prophets of the Old Testament speak to the people of Israel about the coming of the Messiah. In their own way, the ancient philosophers pave the road for humanity's Savior. With God Himself taking flesh and becoming man, the prophecies of ancient Israel are realized. The expectations of the learned scholars and the philosophers of the ancient world are fulfilled.

With the birth of Christ, not only does the hope for salvation emerge, but salvation itself is realized. What exactly does this mean? It means that all of us who are baptized



and believe in Christ and His redemptive work become the *New Israel*. We become the new world that is reborn in Christ. We are the disciples and apostles of Christ. All of us together make up *His Church*. We are the members of His Body.

Celebrating Christmas, we celebrate our own rebirth. We are born again along with Christ. His love embraces us. His presence gives us light. His mercy bestows peace. The burning desire of our love for Christ gives us unspeakable joy. Our hearts are filled daily with praise for the miracle of our salvation. Our lips forever give thanks to God. We ask for His mercy, not only for us but for the entire world. God wants everyone to be saved. We also desire for everyone to know the truth that is Christ. We lead those around us to Christ with words and actions of genuine love.

Saint Stephen, the first martyr, who we honor today, did precisely that. He recognized the God-Man, the Lord and Savior Christ, in the person of Jesus. With joy and faith, Stephen taught others the truth of the Gospel. He did not hesitate to sacrifice his own life for the love of Christ. The holy martyrs seal with their blood the truth of the Gospel, becoming partakers of Christ's Divinity. For this reason, this hymn refers to Stephen as "holy (divine)."

We are also called to such love that directs us to sacrifice for the benefit of others. The goal is to show the world that the Gospel, which is the message of God's love for us, and of our love for God and others, can be authentically experienced by every Christian. We may make mistakes, we may fall into temptation and sin. Yet, through unwavering faith, daily repentance, mutual forgiveness, and joy for the grace of our salvation, let us sacrifice ourselves and our ego. Just like Saint Stephen, let us remain steadfast in our witness to Christ.