

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 53. December 29, 2019. CHRISTMAS 1

It may surprise some of you to know that Christmas wasn't the only major feast we celebrated this last week; in fact we observed a total of four. In the days when Christmas began on December 24th all of them were observed as part of the 12 days. Unfortunately when for most people Christmas ends on the 25th, they are being gradually forgotten. More's the pity – each of them adds something special to the season.

On the 26th directly after Christmas, we celebrated the Feast of St. Stephen. If you remember from Acts, Stephen was the first of the Deacons appointed by the apostles to manage the distribution of goods within the community; he was also openly and boldly proclaimed his faith, which ended in him becoming the first martyr; his death led to a local persecution of Christians which ironically had the effect of spreading the faith outside Jerusalem. Hence Stephen presents us with a paradigm for discipleship: service (diakonia), proclamation and witness (martyria). He also reveals something that will prove true over the following centuries: the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church; far from snuffing out the flame, it makes it grow.

On the 27th we celebrate St. John the Evangelist the writer of the 4th Gospel who is traditionally identified with the nameless 'beloved disciple', the special friend of Jesus who appears in the passion narratives of the same gospel. St. John's well known prolog is especially relevant as it is the basis for the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Instead of providing a birth narrative, John looks at Christ's coming from a cosmic perspective that establishes once and for all that Jesus is far more than a great religious teacher. He is the Word through whom all things were made. That one sentence is what sets Christianity apart from all other religions.

Finally, on the 28th, we remember the Holy Innocents, the children slaughtered at Herod's command in his frantic attempt to destroy the child Jesus. This grim Feast brings us right back down to earth and reminds us of our fallenness and why we need Christ. It reminds us that sin is very real, and that our world is awash in it. Perhaps not something we want to dwell on at Christmas, but in a way it's the reason we have a Christmas in the first place, so we need to be reminded of it.