



ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Sunday, Christmas I, December 27th, 2015

“Know ye not, that as many of us as are baptized into the life
Of Jesus Christ, are also baptized into his Death?”

**✠ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
And of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ✠**

The blessed Saint Stephen and Saint John both knew these words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans are true. Stephen's revelation after his speech to the Sanhedrin speaks to his God given clarity on the subject. St. John's tenure with our Lord on this earth certainly does too. After all, here we have the third Apostle called by Christ; the younger brother of James. John describes himself, “as the disciple that Jesus loved,” a moniker that says volumes; not about John's feelings of himself, but of his feeling the intensity of our Savior's love for him and all men. It might also be pointed out that of the Apostles, only John stood under the cross at Calvary to be washed clean by the very blood, sweat, tears, and water from the side of our Lord as He changed His universe.

Where does this leave the preaching cleric on the Feast of St. John the Apostle, when just yesterday we gazed out these windows like Wenceslas on the feast of Stephen? In other words, who gets the short stick?

Now, there is a good reason for this question. When pondering this sermon several weeks ago over coffee with a friend; he suggested that preaching on one saint was much the same as preaching on another, and to “just go with it.” I bristled at this because the charisms of the saints are innumerable; and yet upon reflection, I saw an opportunity to explore both their differences and their similarities.

At Stephen's debut in Scripture was about 35 A.D., there were about 250 synagogues.

Most of these, where the province of Hebrew speaking Jews, and those on the cusp of accepting the Christ, and The Hellenistic Jews and converts were by nature of their educational upbringing, more tolerant of the Gentile converts and their ways. This concerned not only, (by their way of thinking), the “orthodox” converts to Christ, but the Temple officials as well. Both wanted strict adherence to Jewish religious ceremonial laws, traditions, and habits and saw no compromise. Add to this “murmuring” as Luke calls it, the growing pains of the early Church and combustion was inevitable.

So Stephen, “full of faith and of the Holy Ghost...” is called with the seven in chapter six of Acts, by the Apostles to minister corporally to the widows and poor of the Greco-Jewish “Libertines”. Instead, Luke reports Stephen, “full of faith, and power...”; “wonders and miracles.” ministering spiritually to the people, and in verse 11 annoying the religious leadership enough that they brought him up on false charges of blasphemy.

Stephen is unrelenting in his faith and zeal during his speech. He points out the fact that Moses himself told of the Christ in Deuteronomy, “The Lord God will raise up for you another prophet, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me unto him shall ye hearken.” and goes on to show that this faith in Christ is not a repudiation of Jewish law but rather the ultimate consequence of the faithful

execution of God's law and obedience to the prophets.

For this act of courageous faith Stephen is rewarded with a vision of, "the Son of Man standing" as to greet him; and the throng, "ran upon him with one accord" and stoned him; and as he died, Stephen begged Mercy for those who were killing him, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.", just as our Lord did at Calvary before John, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

John the Apostle and Evangelist started his work for Christ early too. The younger brother of James, son of Zebedee was only the third of the Apostles chosen. Our Lord, in passing bid this fisherman come and he came. John, James, and Peter were with Jesus when Jarius' daughter was raised and of the Transfiguration. John stayed with our Lord in His Agony at Gethsemane. Only he and Peter were sent into the city to prepare for The Last Supper, and he stayed with our Lord after His arrest. He remained at the cross with Mary and was the first to believe Christ had risen.

John's long life was continued with the founding and growth of Church, healing the lame, and suffering in prison with Peter. He was also a theological and historical Gospel and Epistle writer.

Two holy men, St. Stephen, only months, if not weeks in service; faced a hostile and belligerent crowd. He had to know things were going badly, and yet he had the courage to stand Christ's ground in the face of death; and even as he was stoned to death with the aid of Saul, he prayed as our Savior did for those who killed him. He displayed a faithfulness and courage to Christ we can only hope to have in the dark hours of faith. He was called as a servant of Christ to give and minister to the poor, and was so giving spiritually, that it cost him his life. We should all pray for this giving spirit in our lives, to give all to He who gave all for us. Stephen displayed the forgiving nature of our Lord to those who killed him; making him an imitator of Christ. We should all pray for this sense of forgiveness in our lives; in this way we can share the love of Christ with those who need it most, those who are lost from it. Stephen a white-hot

ember of faith, full of Grace, giving and forgiving to the end.

St. John was called early by our Lord and showed faith immediately, without hesitation by dropping his trade and following. May we all follow our Lord, in this way; at a moment's notice when he calls us. St. John followed our Lord through the highs and lows of His earthly ministry. May we display this same long-suffering love to our fellow man as we, and they, traverse this life's highs and lows. St. John, a long burning fire of faith.

So I guess my friend was right, preaching on one Saint is much like preaching on another. For even though these two holy men brought different gifts to our Lord's Ministry and church from and in such different ways, they are one; unified in the gift of Christ's love, through his blood. In other words they are just like us. I pray in this season of giving that we all look closely at the gifts around us and see the extraordinary work of God's love in our fellow saints in training, and embrace them. In this way we too may imitate our Savior and revere the gifts he has given us. AMEN.