

THE 27th DAY OF THE MONTH OF DECEMBER
AFTERFEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST
COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLY APOSTLE, PROTOMARTYR AND
ARCHDEACON STEPHEN COMMEMORATION OF OUR VENERABLE FATHER
THEODORE THE BRANDED, THE CONFESSOR, BROTHER OF ST. THEOPHANES
THE HYMNOGRAPHER
AT VESPERS

On “Lord, I have cried ...,” 6 Stichera; 3 of the holy apostle, in Tone IV:

Spec. Mel.: “As one valiant among the martyrs ...”:

Having enlightened thy thought * with the grace of the spirit, * thou didst appear like an angel * in countenance, O Stephen, * thy body, luminous with inner splendor, * emitting spiritual radiance upon those who beheld thee, * for which cause thou didst receive a vision of light, * for the heavens were most gloriously opened to thee, ** thou first among martyrs, and their boast.

The castings of stones * were to thee like steps * and a ladder leading up to heaven; * for, entering thereupon thou didst behold * the Lord standing at the right hand of the Father, * stretching forth to thee the crown for which thou wast named * with His life-bearing right hand. * Close before Him dost thou stand ** as a worthy victor, the foremost of spiritual athletes.

Radiant with signs and wonders, * thou didst utterly destroy the assembly of the most iniquitous with thy dogmas; * and, slain by them, * put to death by stoning, * thou didst pray for the forgiveness * of those who slew thee, * emulating thereby the Savior's cry, * into Whose hands thou didst commit thy spirit, ** O sacred Stephen.

And 3 Stichera of the venerable one, in the same melody:

To the bitterness of thine exile * was added the most grievous misery of imprisonment, * O venerable one, * when he who iniquitously * usurped the lawful throne * grievously perverted the laws of the Faith * and cast down the most pure image of the Savior. * But by the grace of God, O favorite of Christ, ** thou didst put him to shame.

Neither prison, nor confinement, * nor lightless gloom, * nor wounds, nor beatings, * nor grievous, long and unbearable affliction, * nor lack of food, * could separate thee from thy love for God, * O divinely eloquent father Theodore; * for thou didst steadfastly endure them, ** foreseeing the reward of thy labors.

In place of tribulation * the just Judge of the contest hath given thee liberty; * in place of darkness, radiance. * And for that which was graven on thy face, O wondrous one, * thou hast been written in the Book of Life, * and hast been numbered * among the firstborn of the Church in the highest, * and hast most joyously come ** to the feast of the angels.

Glory ..., the composition of Anatolius, in Tone II:

A most splendid crown is offered to the King and Master of all, Who was born on earth, fashioned not of rubies, but resplendent with the drops of thy blood, O Stephen. Come, ye who love the martyrs, and, taking up hymns as though they were flowers, let us crown him, and chanting hymns, let us say: O protomartyr, who illumined thy soul with wisdom and grace, entreat Christ God that He grant us peace and great mercy!

Both now ..., in the same tone:

A great and most glorious wonder is wrought today: A Virgin giveth birth, yet her womb suffereth no corruption! The Word is incarnate, yet is not separated from the Father! Angels give glory in company with shepherds; and with them we cry aloud: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind!

On the Aposticha, these Stichera, in Tone I:

Spec. Mel.: "Joy of the ranks of heaven ...":

Let us hymn Him Who is now worshipped * by angels, shepherds and Magi, * Who shone forth from the Father before the ages, * and, as the Son, ever existeth in the bosom of the Father, * Who in latter times hath sat upon His Mother's arms ** as upon a throne.

Verse: From the womb before the morning star * have I begotten Thee.

Assembling in Bethlehem, O ye faithful, * let us behold the Creator of all lying in a manger * and those who bear * a choice gift of three substances * from the land of Chaldea to the King and God, ** Who for our sake was to lie three days dead.

Verse: The Lord said unto my Lord, * Sit Thou at My right hand.

From the Virgin Thou wast born in the cave, * and, surrounding Thee, the angelic armies cried aloud: * Glory to Thee, O God, in the highest, * Who hast been born in the guise of a servant, * and hast renewed the world * in the womb of the Virgin, ** the Mother that hath not known a man.

Glory ..., the composition of Anatolius, in Tone VI:

First among martyrs and deacons hast thou been shown to be, O apostle Stephen; adornment of spiritual athletes, confirmation of the faithful, glory of the righteous. In that thou dost stand before the throne of the King of all, ask thou cleansing of transgressions for us who celebrate thine honored memory, that we be deemed worthy of the Kingdom of heaven.

Both now ..., the composition of Gerasimus, in Tone VI:

Today all the angels hold chorus in heaven, and men rejoice, and all creation leapeth for joy because of the Lord and Savior born in Bethlehem, for all the delusion of idolatry hath ceased, and Christ reigneth throughout the ages.

Troparion of the holy apostle, in Tone IV:

Thou didst fight the good fight, * denouncing the impiety of the tyrants, O proto-martyr and apostle of Christ; * for, stoned at the hands of the iniquitous ones, * thou hast received a crown from on high * from the right hand of the Lord, * and didst exclaim to God, crying out: ** O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!

Glory ..., the Troparion of the venerable one, in Tone VIII:

Instructor in Orthodoxy, teacher of piety and purity, * beacon for the whole world, divinely inspired adornment of monastics, * O Theodore most wise, by thy teachings hast thou illumined all. ** O harp of the Spirit, entreat Christ God, that our souls be saved.

Both now ..., the Troparion of the feast, in Tone IV:

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, * hath shined the light of knowledge upon the world; * for thereby, they that worshipped the stars * were instructed by a star * to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, * and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. ** O Lord, glory be to Thee.

AT MATINS

On “God is the Lord ...,” the Troparion of the feast, in Tone IV:

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, * hath shined the light of knowledge upon the world; * for thereby, they that worshipped the stars * were instructed by a star * to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, * and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. ** O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Then the Troparion of the apostle, in Tone IV:

Thou didst fight the good fight, * denouncing the impiety of the tyrants, O proto-martyr and apostle of Christ; * for, stoned at the hands of the iniquitous ones, * thou hast received a crown from on high * from the right hand of the Lord, * and didst exclaim to God, crying out: ** O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!

Glory ..., the Troparion of the venerable one, in Tone VIII:

Instructor in Orthodoxy, teacher of piety and purity, * beacon for the whole world, divinely inspired adornment of monastics, * O Theodore most wise, by thy teachings hast thou illumined all. ** O harp of the Spirit, entreat Christ God, that our souls be saved.

Both now ..., the Troparion of the feast (Once).

After the 1st chanting of the Psalter, the Sessional Hymn, in Tone III:

Spec. Mel.: “This day the Virgin ...”:

She who conceived without seed giveth birth unto the Redeemer; Magi come to worship Life, and mortals and angels give glory. The manger and the cave offer gifts, raising a hymn to the newborn Babe, the pre-eternal God.

Glory ..., Both now ..., the foregoing repeated.

After the 2nd chanting of the Psalter, the Sessional Hymn, in Tone IV:

Spec. Mel.: “Joseph was amazed ...”:

How can He that is in no wise limited be contained in a womb? How can He that is in the bosom of the Father rest in the arms of a Mother? He knoweth all things as He hath been well-pleased and hath willed; for, though incorporeal, He willingly became incarnate, and for our sake became that which He had not been, and, without departing from His essence, partook of our nature. Christ hath been twice begotten, wishing to fill the world on high!

Glory ..., Both now ..., the foregoing is repeated.

The first canon of the feast, with 6 Troparia, including the Irmos; and two canons, of the saints, with 4 Troparia each.

ODE I

Canon of the feast, in Tone I:

Irmos: Christ is born, render ye glory. * Christ cometh from heaven, meet ye Him. * Christ is on earth, be ye exalted. * O all the earth, sing unto the Lord, * and sing praises in gladness, O ye people, * for He hath been glorified.

That which, though fashioned in the image of God, became wholly corrupt through transgression, having fallen away from the divine life, hath the wise Creator restored, for He hath been glorified.

The Creator, seeing mankind, whom He had fashioned with His own hands, perishing, descended, bowing down the heavens, and becoming truly incarnate, taking upon Himself all the essence of man, through the pure and divine Virgin, for He hath been glorified.

Christ God, being the wisdom, Word, Power, Effulgence and Son of the Father, having made Himself unknowable to the powers of heaven, and even more so to those on earth, hath become a man and restored us, for He hath been glorified.

Canon of the holy apostle, the composition of John of Damascus, in Tone V

Irmos: **C**hrist, who with an upraised arm * bringeth wars to naught, * hath shaken horse and rider in the Red Sea; * but Israel hath He saved * as they chanted a song of victory.

Come ye, and with wreaths of hymns let us gloriously crown the first martyr of the Church of Christ; and, crowned with the divine grace of Stephen, let us chant a hymn of victory.

Possessed of the meek mind of the Teacher and humility wrought by God through love, O Stephen, thou didst become the most senior of the deacons and an intercessor for widows.

As is meet, thou wast called to help the apostles of Christ; and being a faithful deacon, thou didst, by thy blood, pass on to the place where Christ is, O Stephen, thou namesake of crowns.

Theotokion: **F**or mankind's sake, O Christ, Thou wast borne by the Virgin and wrapped as a babe in swaddling clothes; and Thy protomartyr, buried beneath the stones cast at him, hath shed his human life.

Canon of the venerable one, the acrostic whereof is: "I weave thy praises, O my brother," the composition of Theophanes, in Tone IV:

Irmos: **T**hrough the deep of the Red Sea, * marched dry shod Israel of old, * and by Moses' outstretched hands, * raised in the form of a cross, * the power of Amalek was routed in the wilderness.

The cherubim, beholding the inscription graven on thine honored brow, withdrew from the Tree of Life; and the fiery sword giveth way to thee with high esteem, O all-wise Theodore.

An inscription was set above the head of Christ the King, written on the Tree of the Cross; but thine inscription was graven on thy face, O all-wise one, inscribed thereon magnificently.

Lifted up upon the Cross, the Lord was pierced through His side; and thou, stretched out on the rack and branded like a prized lamb, didst patiently endure the red-hot needles, O initiate of the sacred mysteries.

Adorned with all manner of wisdom, O father Theodore, thou didst openly denounce the ruler for his evildoing; and by enduring torments disquieted his heretical thoughts.

Theotokion: Thou wast the abode of the supremely wise Wisdom, O most pure Birthgiver of God; who alone art the salvation and hymn of the faithful, for today thou hast given birth unto divine Deliverance for us.

ODE III

Canon of the feast

Irmos: To the Son who was begotten of the Father * without change before all ages, * and in the last times, without seed, was made flesh of the Virgin, * to Christ our God let us cry aloud: * Thou hast raised up our horn, holy art Thou, O Lord.

Adam, fashioned of dust, partook of a higher inspiration, yet he was led to stumble into corruption through a woman's deceit, seeing Christ born from a woman, he cried aloud: O Thou Who for my sake hast become like me, holy art Thou O Lord!

O Lord Christ, mingling with clay, Thou didst conform Thyself thereto, imparting Thy divine essence to vile flesh by participating therein, becoming earthly, yet remaining God, and lifting up our horn: holy art Thou O Lord!

O Bethlehem, thou king of the princes of Judah, be glad! For Christ Who doth shepherd Israel, seated on the shoulders of the cherubim, hath manifestly come forth from thee, and, having lifted up our horn, hath established His reign over all.

Canon of the holy apostle

Irmos: By Thy command Thou didst establish the earth upon nothing * and suspended it unsupported; * do Thou establish Thy Church on the unshakeable rock of Thy commandments, O Christ, * who alone art good * and the Lover of mankind.

Stephen, the warrior of Christ, having lawfully arrayed himself against the murderers, vested in the invincible power of God, denounced all the wicked opposition of the iniquitous.

Aflame with the zeal of the love of Christ and having stripped down for combat, filled with faith and the Spirit of God, O protomartyr, thou didst proclaim to all the divinely appointed preaching of the fishermen.

As a proclaimer of the hidden and truly divine life, heedless of this present life, through deed the protomartyr manifestly showed to all truth triumphant, having assented to death, O Master.

Theotokion: For our sake the Master entered the cave of life through condescension; and Stephen, chief among the martyrs, departeth from human burdens, overcome by the love of the Master.

Canon of the venerable one

Irmos: Thy Church, O Christ, rejoiceth in Thee crying aloud: * Thou, O Lord, art my strength, * my refuge and foundation.

Unable to say anything against thy doctrines, O venerable one, he who was filled with pagan madness resorted to blows.

Thou didst patiently endure wounds on thy shoulders and breast for Christ's sake, and blows to thy head, O divinely-inspired one.

With spiritual wisdom and zeal of mind didst thou put to shame the impious and iniquitous one by thy most sacred dogmas.

Theotokion: With prophetic eyes David beheld thee in Bethlehem, O Mother of God, as a coffer bearing the supremely divine Infant.

Kontakion of the feast, in Tone III:

Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence; * and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable. * Angels with shepherds give glory; * the Magi journey with a star; ** for our sake a young Child is born, Who is the pre-eternal God.

Ikos: Bethlehem hath opened Eden! We have found Joy in a secret place: come, and let us receive the things of paradise within the cave. There the unwatered Root hath blossomed, bearing forgiveness as its fruit. There an unfailing Wellspring hath been found, from whence David of old longed to drink. There the Virgin hath given birth to the Babe, straightway quenching the thirst of Adam and David. Wherefore, let us hasten to this place where now is born a young Child, the pre-eternal God!

Sessional Hymn of the holy apostle, in Tone I:

Spec. Mel.: “Thy tomb, O Savior ...”:

O apostle of Christ, first among the deacons, wise protomartyr, chief among the martyrs: having sanctified the ends of the earth with thy sufferings, thou hast also illumined the souls of all mankind with miracles. O all-praised Stephen, from all manner of tribulations deliver those who honor thee.

Glory ..., Sessional Hymn of the venerable one, in Tone III:

Spec. Mel.: “Of the divine faith ...”:

Thou wast a mouth of boldness, most wisely putting to shame the audacity of the tyrant by the patient endurance of thy sufferings; for, branded on the brow for the most precious icon of Christ, O Theodore, thou didst proclaim to all that it is meet to honor and glorify Him, begging great mercy for us.

Both now ..., Theotokion, in Tone III:

Gazing upon Him Whom she had conceived without seed, the all-immaculate one exclaimed in wonder to Him Who was born from her: Even though Thou hast been wrapped in the guise of human nature, yet all things proclaim Thee to be God, O beginningless Child, Who art co-beginningless with the beginningless Father and grantest unto all great mercy!

ODE IV

Canon of the feast

Irmos: Rod of the root of Jesse, * and flower that blossomed from his stem, * O Christ, Thou hast sprung from the Virgin. * From the Mountain overshadowed by the forest * Thou hast come, made flesh from her that knew not wedlock, * O God who art not formed from matter. * Glory to Thy power, O Lord.

O Christ Thou art He Whom Jacob foretold of old, as the expectation of the nations, and Who hath shone forth from the tribe of Judah, and come to overthrow the power of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria, transforming falsehood into godly faith. Glory to Thy power, O Lord!

Shining forth, a Star out of Jacob, O Master, Thou hast filled with joy the wise observers of the stars, the followers of the words of Balaam, the soothsayer of old; manifestly receiving the first-fruits of the nations who have entered in to worship Thee. Glory to Thy power, O Lord!

Like drops of rain falling upon the earth, and like the gentle rain upon the fleece, O Christ, Thou hast descended upon the womb of the Virgin. Ethiopia and Tharsis, the islands of Arabia and Saba, and they who rule all the land of the Medes, have fallen down before Thee, O Savior. Glory to Thy power, O Lord!

Canon of the holy apostle

Irmos: Habbakuk, prophetically apprehending * Thy divine self-emptying, O Christ, * cried out to Thee with trembling: * Thou hast come for the salvation of Thy people; * to save Thine anointed Ones.

Emulating the zeal of the angels, and splendidly adorned with an angelic countenance, thou didst behold the glory of God and the radiance thereof.

The slanderer, judge and tyrant, the slayer of mankind and father of lies, appeared, O Stephen, but he vanquished himself, laying the very snares into which he fell.

Canon of the venerable one

Irmos: Beholding Thee, the Sun of righteousness, * lifted up upon the Cross, * the Church now standeth arrayed and doth worthily cry aloud: * Glory be to Thy power, O Lord!

Stretched out upon the rack, O Theodore, with audacious vehemence and barbaric cruelty wast thou branded as one who venerated the icon of Christ and the Mother of God.

Having served the Master through abstinence from thy youth, O blessed one, placing thy trust constantly in Him, thou wast straightway most splendidly adorned with the blood of thy witnessing.

Luminous as the sun, O God-bearer, thou didst hasten from the East, emitting the rays of thy confession and thine exceedingly wise and most valiant opposition.

Theotokion: **B**lessed is God the Word, Who in His tender compassion cometh to Bethlehem from thy womb which knoweth not wedlock, O most pure one. Him do thou now entreat, that He save those who have recourse unto thee.

ODE V

Canon of the feast

Irmos: **A**s Thou art the God of peace and Father of compassions, * Thou hast sent unto us Thine Angel of great counsel, * granting us peace. * Wherefore guided towards the light of the knowledge of God, * and watching by night we glorify Thee, * O Lover of mankind.

Submitting to be recorded among Thy servants at the command of Caesar, Thou hast freed us slaves from the enemy and sin, O Christ; and having abased Thyself for us, Thou hast rendered our nature divine through Thy union and sharing therein.

Behold, the Virgin hath conceived in her womb, as was foretold of old, and hath given birth to God made man, yet remaineth a virgin. O ye sinners who for her sake have been reconciled with God, faithfully hymn her as the true Theotokos.

Canon of the holy apostle

Irmos: **O** Thou Who hast clothed Thyself in light as with a garment, * I rise early unto Thee and cry out to Thee: * Enlighten my darkened soul, O Christ, * in that Thou alone art compassionate!

More exalted than the heavenly spheres and full of Thine ineffable glory, O Christ, Thy protomartyr hath shone forth like an angel.

With deluges of divinely eloquent words the protomartyr inundated the vile murderers; and, pelted by their countless stones, he received a victor's crown.

The boldness of the divine zeal of the protomartyr was invincible, for manfully did he stand against the murderers, even unto the shedding of his blood.

Theotokion: **T**he protomartyr beheld Him, Who came forth from the Mother who know not a man, standing in the heavens in the immutable divinity and glory of the Father.

Canon of the venerable one

Irmos: **T**hou, O Lord, who camest into the world, * art my light, * a holy light turning from the darkness of ignorance * those who sing Thy praises in faith.

Sojourning in a strange land, thou didst steadfastly endure exile, affliction, wounding, imprisonment, and the vilest of dungeons.

Now thou dost truly rejoice, receiving a victor's crown on the splendid and radiant feast of the godly protomartyr.

The vow of piety which thou didst make in thy childhood, thou didst keep even unto the end, remaining undefiled, O invincible Theodore.

Theotokion: We brandish thee as an invincible weapon against the foe, O Bride of God, for we have acquired thee as our help and hope of salvation.

ODE VI

Canon of the feast

Irmos: The sea monster spat forth Jonah as it had received him, * like a babe from the womb: * while the Word, having dwelt in the Virgin and taken flesh, * came forth from her yet kept her incorrupt. * For being Himself not subject to decay. * He preserved His Mother free from all harm.

Christ our God, Whom the Father begat before the morning star, hath come forth incarnate, from a womb. He Who ruleth over the most pure powers lieth in a manger of dumb beasts and is wrapped in swaddling-bands, loosing the knotted bonds of transgressions.

A young Child, a Son, is born of the clay of Adam and given to the faithful: He is the Father and Prince of the age to come, and is called the Angel of great Counsel. He is the mighty God Who exerciseth dominion over all creation.

Canon of the holy apostle

Irmos: Calm the raging sea of the passions, * O Master Christ, * with its soul-destroying tempest, * and lead me up from corruption * in that Thou art compassionate.

Stephen, the glorious chief of the martyrs, having transcended the faithful laws of nature by grace, hath been rendered luminous by the glory of God.

Being a most renowned emulator of Thine honored Passion, O Master Christ, Stephen repayeth his murderers with a blessing.

Preserve Thou those who hymn the protomartyr untouched by vile murder, and grant them Thine inheritance, in that Thou art compassionate.

Theotokion: Thy birth was the beginning of the salvation of the universe and the foundation of the godly confession of the martyrs.

Canon of the venerable one

Irmos: The church crieth out unto Thee O Lord, * 'I will sacrifice unto Thee with a voice of praise * having been cleansed of the blood of the demons' * by the blood that for mercy's sake flowed from Thy side.

Still drenched by the sweat of thy struggles, thou didst stand before the Judge of the contest, Who by His just judgment doth govern all creation, O all-blessed God-bearer Theodore.

Naught could separate thee from the love of Christ: neither the wounding of thy body, nor the threat of the death sentence, nor the loss of friends, O all-blessed Theodore.

As a most radiant son of light and of the day, thou didst repose full of light, growing up towards the radiance of God, ever overflowing with light day and night, O thou who art pleasing unto God.

Theotokion: **H**aving found thee alone to be a most pure lily, a lily of the valley amid the thorns, O Mother of God, the noetic Bridegroom made His abode within thee.

Kontakion of the holy apostle, in Tone III:

Spec. Mel.: “Today the Virgin ...”:

Yesterday the Master came to us in the flesh, * and today his servant departeth from the flesh. * Yesterday He Who reigneth over all flesh was born, * and today his servant is slain by stoning. ** For His sake the godly protomartyr Stephen doth meet his end.

Ikos: **L**ike a radiant star Stephen the protomartyr doth shine forth on the Nativity of Christ, illumining and enlightening the ends of the earth, but casting a pall of darkness over all the impiety of the Jews. Reproving them with words of wisdom, discoursing from the Scriptures, and persuading those who Jesus - born from the Virgin - is the Son of God and God, the godly protomartyr Stephen put to shame their impious wickedness.

ODE VII

Canon of the feast

Irmos: **S**corning the impious decree of the godless one, * the Children brought up together in godliness * feared not the threat of fire, * but standing in the midst of the flames, they sang: * O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou.

The piping shepherds received an awesome vision of light; for the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and an angel cried aloud: Sing ye, for Christ, the blessed God of your fathers, is born!

Suddenly, at the voice of the angel, the armies of heaven cried out: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will among men! Christ hath shone forth: the blessed God of your fathers!”

“What words are these?” said the shepherds; “Let us go and see what hath become of the blessed Christ!” And hastening to Bethlehem, they bowed down in worship with the Theotokos, chanting: “O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou!”

Canon of the holy apostle

Irmos: The supremely exalted Lord of our fathers * quenched the flame, * and bedewed the Youths * as they chanted in harmony: * O God, blessed art Thou!

The iniquitous, gnashing their teeth like beasts and falling upon Stephen with murderous intent, slew him as he chanted in a godly manner: O God, Blessed art Thou!

O Stephen, adorned with stones as with many-colored and comely flowers, thou didst offer thyself unto Christ, the Bestower of life, crying out: O God, Blessed art Thou!

Almost insurmountable was the opposition of Paul, who at first persecuted the saints, but later led the Gentiles unto Christ throughout all ages.

Caught up by the Holy Spirit, O Stephen, thou didst ineffably behold the Son and the Father, and thou didst cry out to the Trinity: O God, Blessed art Thou!

Theotokion: An animate crown is offered unto Thee, as to a king, O Thou Who shone forth from the divine and pure Virgin, for in a godly manner we chant unto Thee: O God, Blessed art Thou!

Canon of the venerable one

Irmos: In the Persian furnace the youths and descendants of Abraham, * burning with a love of piety * rather than by a flame of fire, * cried aloud saying: * Blessed art Thou in the temple of Thy glory, O Lord.

Aflame with Orthodox zeal, O all-wise one, with boldness thou didst spurn the food of vile and grievous heresy, crying aloud: Blessed art Thou, O Lord my God!

The discourse of wisdom, the discourse of dogmas, the discourse of most pious doctrines did God the Word give unto thee, O father, who cried aloud: Blessed art Thou, O Lord my God!

Having shone forth from the East like the sun, O father Theodore, thou didst shine forth the radiance of piety upon the earth, enlightening and teaching it the veneration of icons.

Theotokion: Thou hast been revealed to be all-adorned, exceedingly glorious, and splendid with the light of virginity, O Mother, who hast given birth unto God in the flesh, and who wrapped in swaddling clothes Him Who manifestly clotheth all things.

ODE VIII

Canon of the feast

Irmos: The furnace moist with dew * was an image and prefiguring of a wonder past nature, * burning not the Children whom it had received, * so the fire of the Godhead consumed not the Virgin's womb * into which it had descended. * Therefore in song let us sing: * Let the whole creation bless the Lord * and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages.

The daughter of Babylon carried off the captive children of David from Sion to herself; but now she hath sent her own children, the magi bearing gifts, to the God-pleasing daughter of David, who prayeth. Wherefore, chanting, let us sing: Let all creation bless the Lord and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages!

The harps refused to play their sad songs, for the children of Sion would not sing in a strange land; but Christ, shining forth in Bethlehem, hath destroyed all the delusion of Babylon and her musical instruments. Wherefore, chanting, let us sing: Let all creation bless the Lord and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages!

Babylon received the plunder of the kingdom of Sion and its captive riches; but Christ hath drawn its treasures to His Sion, guiding the star-observing kings by a star. Wherefore, chanting, let us sing: Let all creation bless the Lord and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages!

Canon of the holy apostle

Irmos: **Unto Thee the Fashioner of all, * the children in the furnace chanted a hymn: * All ye works of the Lord, * supremely exalt Him throughout all ages.**

Come, ye who are noetically illumined by the glory of Stephen, let us chant unto God incarnate: Hymn ye the Lord, all ye works, and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages!

For thee, O Stephen, is fashioned a wreath of sufferings, as for one who hath conquered most wicked falsehood. Wherefore, thou didst cry aloud: Hymn the Lord and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages.

Christ appeared to thee in the glory of the Father, manifestly promising thee recompense for thy sufferings. Wherefore, thou didst cry aloud: Hymn the Lord and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages!

The nativity of the Master and the commemoration of the protomartyr are cause for us to join chorus. Wherefore, let us unceasingly hymn the Lord and supremely exalt Him throughout all ages!

Theotokion: **T**hee, who in a manner past understanding hast given birth unto the Lord, the God-man, yet remainest a virgin, O Virgin, all we, the works of the Lord, hymn and supremely exalt throughout all ages.

Canon of the venerable one

Irmos: **Having spread his hands, Daniel closed the lions jaws * in their den; * while the zealously pious youths, * girded with virtue, * quenched the power of the fire and cried aloud: * Bless ye the Lord, all ye works of the Lord.**

Trusting, like a lion, in the strength of thy spirit, O all-blessed one, thou wast not afraid of the assault of the heretic, the namesake of savagery. And, spitting upon him, rejoicing thou didst cry out to the people: Bless the Lord, all ye works of the Lord!

Having adorned thy soul with manliness and acquired a mind full of understanding, thou didst perfect thy will with chastity, O blessed one, and directing thy thoughts with righteousness, thou dost cry aloud: Bless the Lord, all ye works of the Lord!

By thy chastenings thou didst dry up the rushing torrent of heresy, O venerable father, destroying the snares of the impious with thy most wise instructions, and crying aloud: Bless the Lord, all ye works of the Lord!

Theotokion: **G**od, Who fashioned human nature in the beginning. is therein clothed through thy most pure and holy womb, O all-pure one, being born today in Bethlehem in accordance with the prophecies. Wherefore, we all call thee blessed, O Mary, Bride of God.

ODE IX

Canon of the feast

Irmos: **A** strange and most wondrous mystery do I see: * the cave is heaven; * the Virgin the throne of the cherubim; * the manger a room, in which Christ God, * whom nothing can contain, is laid. * Whom we praise and magnify.

The magi beheld the excellent course of the strange star which had newly appeared, illumining the heavens and marking the birth of Christ the King in Bethlehem, for our salvation.

The star revealed the newborn infant King to the magi who said: “Where is He, for we have come to worship Him?” But Herod who fought against God, enraged, was troubled, seeking to slay the Christ.

Herod inquired concerning the time of the star, following whose course the magi worshipped Christ with gifts in Bethlehem; but, guided thereby to their homeland, they left the cruel murderer of the infants behind in mockery.

Canon of the holy apostle

Irmos: **O** Isaiah, rejoice and be glad! * The Virgin hath conceived in her womb, * and hath borne a Son, Emmanuel, * who is both God and man; * and Orient is His name; * Him we magnify, and the Virgin we call blessed.

O Stephen, thou hast surpassed all degrees of praise, and with every word thou didst carry away trophies of victory. For the human mind is incapable of weaving a crown of praise worthy of thee.

Oh, the blessed voice with which thou didst hold forth, O Stephen! Lay not this sin to the charge of my murderers, O Master Christ, thou didst cry, But, as Thou art my God and Creator, receive Thou my spirit as a sacrifice of savor most sweet.

Thou didst receive recompense for thy sufferings: a victor's wreath from the right hand of the Almighty, and now, O all-blessed one, standing before the King of all, with glory and grace crown thou those who hymn thee.

Theotokion: The timeless Son, begotten of the Father, hath received from the Virgin a beginning of existence in time. Slain for His sake, Stephen, the emulator of Christ, hath now inherited everlasting life from the Origin thereof.

Canon of the venerable one

Irmos: A cornerstone not cut by hand O Virgin, * was cut from thee the unhewn mountain: * even Christ, Who hath joined together the disparate natures; * therefore rejoicing we magnify thee, * O Theotokos.

Compelled by the will of God, thou didst readily endure the assaults of persecutions, O divinely wise one; and having set at naught the savagery of the persecutor, thou hast received a crown for thy struggles, O father.

Thou hast discovered heavenly riches, and an abiding home instead of bitter imprisonment, exile and wandering. And thou dost now live in rapture, receiving eternal delight.

Offering hymnody unto the Master, O father, cease not to offer prayers concerning my infirmity, for the sake of our brotherhood and dwelling together; that, as we have lived together, we may also attain deification together.

Theotokion: We magnify thee, O Virgin, as the true Theotokos and divine Maiden, for, in a manner transcending comprehension and all telling, thou hast given birth in Bethlehem unto God the Word and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes.

Exapostilarion of the holy apostle:

Spec. Mel.: “By the Spirit in the sanctuary ...”:

Thou didst behold the beginningless Word standing at the right hand of the Father, and thy face was filled with ineffable light, O boast of the apostles and glory of the martyrs. And adorned with a crown fashioned of the rocks of thy stoning, thou didst receive a divine end.

Glory ..., Both now ..., Exapostilarion of the Feast:

Having been born as a babe, Thou wast laid in a manger, and the star summoned forth wise men three in number. Shepherds, marveling at the wonder, hastened to behold God Who had become a man; and the choirs of angels, amazed, cried aloud: Glory to God in the highest!

On the Praises, 6 Stichera of the holy apostle, in the appointed Tone:

In Tone I, the composition of Cyprian: O ye faithful, let us weave for the protomartyr a spiritual athlete's wreath, fashioned of words as of flowers. For he prepared the martyrs' way, and cried out in joy, I see the heavens opened and the Son of God standing at the right hand of the invisible Father!

In Tone II, the composition of Anatolius: First among the deacons and first among the martyrs hast thou shown thyself to be, O most holy Stephen; for thou wast a path for the saints bringing many martyrs to the Lord. Wherefore, heaven was opened unto thee, and God appeared to Thee. Him do thou beseech, that our souls be saved.

In sanctity wast thou clothed, O blessed Stephen, protomartyr and first deacon, who hast a portion with the angels. Intercede and pray to the Lord, the sinless Savior, on our behalf.

As is meet, let us honor Stephen, the valiant protomartyr, first deacon and favorite of Christ; for, standing in the midst of the iniquitous, he beheld the Son standing at the right hand of the Father.

In Tone IV, the composition of John the Monk: O glorious Stephen, citizen of heaven, blessed favorite of Christ: Pray thou on behalf of our souls!

Stephen, the goodly beginning of martyrdom, full of grace and power, working great wonders and signs among the people, was slain by the iniquitous by stoning. Yet he shone forth as an angel, and beheld at the right hand of power the glory of Thee, Who wast crucified for our sake, and was taken away to heaven by the Spirit of grace; wherefore, abiding now with the choirs of the angels, he prayeth that our souls be saved.

Glory ..., the composition of Cyprian, in Tone VI:

O apostle and protomartyr, portal of martyrdom, glory of the righteous, and boast of the apostles: standing in the tribunal thou didst behold the heavens opened, and the Son of God standing at the right hand of the invisible Father. Wherefore with thy countenance shining like that of an angel, in joy thou didst cry out concerning those who were stoning thee to death: Lay not this sin to their charge! And now pray thou for those who praise thee with love, that they may receive the cleansing of their sins and great mercy.

Both now ..., the composition of John the Monk, in Tone VI:

An unapproachable mystery hath been accomplished today in Bethlehem: the Invisible One is seen, the Incorporeal One is incarnate, the Word taketh on flesh, and becometh that which He had not been. A Virgin giveth birth in a cave unto a little Babe, the Fashioner of creation. A manger is formed into a heavenly throne, and beasts represent the ranks of the cherubim, Shepherds marvel, Magi bear gifts, and angels, chanting, say: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace good will among all mankind, O immutable Emmanuel!

On the Aposticha, these Stichera of the feast, in Tone VI:

Spec. Mel.: “Proceed, ye hosts of angels ...”:

All creation riseth with joy to meet the feast, and the heavens rejoice with us; for the Creator, incarnate of the Virgin, hath most gloriously been seen in a manger in Bethlehem of Judah. Let us say to the people: O our blessed God, Who hast been born, glory be to Thee!

Verse: From the womb before the morning star * have I begotten Thee.

Being the pre-eternal Word, Thou didst come to earth to become incarnate from the Virgin, and wast seen as a Babe, that Thou mightest make mortals heavenly. Wise men didst Thou bring from Persia to worship Thee, O Compassionate One, and with them we cry out in joy: O our blessed God, Who hast been born, glory be to Thee!

Verse: The Lord said unto my Lord. * Sit Thou at My right hand.

O Jesus. Who for our sake shone forth from the Father before the ages, for our sake Thou didst appear as a little Babe, wishing to renew all mankind, which had grown old through the transgression. Wherefore, in thanksgiving we all ever cry out to Thee: O our blessed God, Who hast been born, glory be to Thee!

Glory ..., The composition of Cyprian, in Tone VIII:

Rejoice in the Lord, O crown-bearer Stephen, thou emulator of the Master, for thou wast the first martyr of Christ our King, and hast abolished the falsehood of the iniquitous Jews, praying unto the Lord for us.

Both now ..., The composition of John the Monk, in Tone VIII:

How can I describe the great mystery? The Incorporeal One is incarnate, the Word assumeth flesh, the Invisible One is seen, the Intangible One is touched, and the Beginningless One hath a beginning in time. The Son of God becometh the Son of man, even Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever!

AT LITURGY

On the Beatitudes, 8 Troparia: 4 from ODE I of the canon of the feast, and 4 from ODE III of the canon of the holy apostle.

That which is in the image of God, but which became wholly corrupt through the transgression, having fallen from the blessings of divine life, doth the wise Creator make new again, for He hath been glorified. (Twice)

The Creator, when he beheld man perishing, whom He had fashioned with His own hands, bowed the heavens also, and came down. And from the divine and pure Virgin He taketh upon Himself all man's nature, becoming truly incarnate, for He hath been glorified!

Christ God, the Wisdom, Word, Power and radiant Splendor of the Father, having hidden His powers, both heavenly and earthly, and become incarnate, hath renewed us, for He hath been glorified!

Stephen, the warrior of Christ, having lawfully arrayed himself against the deicides, vested in the invincible power of God, denounced all the wicked opposition of the iniquitous.

Aflame with the zeal of the love of Christ and having stripped down for combat, filled with faith and the Spirit of God, O protomartyr, thou didst proclaim to all the divinely appointed preaching of the fishermen.

As a proclaimer of the hidden and truly divine life, heedless of this present life, through deed the protomartyr manifestly showed to all truth triumphant, having assented to death, O Master.

Theotokion: For our sake the Master entered the cave of life through condescension; and Stephen, chief among the martyrs, departeth from human burdens, overcome by the love of the Master.

Troparion of the feast, in Tone IV:

Thy Nativity, O Christ our God, * hath shined the light of knowledge upon the world; * for thereby, they that worshipped the stars * were instructed by a star * to worship Thee, the Sun of Righteousness, * and to know Thee, the Dayspring from on high. * O Lord, glory be to Thee.

Troparion of the holy apostle, in Tone IV:

Thou didst fight the good fight, * denouncing the impiety of the tyrants, O protomartyr and apostle of Christ; * for, stoned at the hands of the iniquitous ones, * thou hast received a crown from on high * from the right hand of the Lord, * and didst exclaim to God, crying out: ** O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!

Troparion of the venerable one, in Tone VIII:

Instructor in Orthodoxy, teacher of piety and purity, * beacon for the whole world, divinely inspired adornment of monastics, * O Theodore most wise, by thy teachings hast thou illumined all. ** O harp of the Spirit, entreat Christ God, that our souls be saved.

Kontakion of the holy apostle, in Tone III:

Yesterday the Master came to us in the flesh, and today his servant departeth from the flesh. Yesterday He that reigneth over the flesh was born, and today his servant is slain by stoning. For His sake the godly protomartyr Stephen doth meet his end.

Kontakion of the feast, in Tone III:

Today the Virgin giveth birth to Him Who is transcendent in essence; * and the earth offereth a cave to Him Who is unapproachable. * Angels with shepherds give glory; * the Magi journey with a star; ** for our sake a young Child is born, Who is the pre-eternal God.

The Prokeimenon, in the VIII Tone: Let all the earth worship Thee and chant unto Thee; * let them chant unto Thy name, O Most High.

Prokeimenon, in Tone VIII: Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

Verse: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaimeth the work of His hands.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES (6:8-7:60)

In those days; Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. Then they suborned men, which said. We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders. and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Then said the high priest, Are these things so? And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Haran: and from thence, when his father was

dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things? Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man, standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Alleluia, in Tone I: The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaimeth the work of His hands.

Alleluia, in Tone I: The heavens shall confess Thy wonders, O Lord, and Thy truth in the congregation of the saints.

Verse: God Who is glorified in the council of the saints.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW (21 :33-42)

The Lord spake a Parable saying: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard

unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

In place of “Meet it is” we chant the following

Refrain: Magnify, O my soul, the most pure Virgin Theotokos, who is more honorable and more glorious than the armies on high!

Katavasia I: A strange and most wondrous mystery do I see: * the cave is heaven; * the Virgin the throne of the cherubim; * the manger a room, in which Christ God, * whom nothing can contain, is laid. * Whom we praise and magnify.

Communion Verse of the Feast: The Lord hath sent redemption unto His people.

Verse of the holy apostle: Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.