

**STONING OF ST.STEPHEN** by Marcel Babineau  
Much of this information was taken from Wikipedia



This stained glass is dated 1863 and is the centerpiece of St. Stephen's Church, Milltown, NB. It is flanked by stained glass depictions of the Annunciation, Nativity, Crucifixion and Jesus with children, which enhances this arrangement. This set arrived in St. Stephen by boat in 1863. To the right of the stained glass is a reliquary regarded as containing a piece of bone from the arm of St. Stephen.

A recent local event: In 2005, on entering our church, a lady with a pilgrimage tour bus from Connecticut experienced warmth and a severe case of shingles she suffered with for 2 years was immediately healed. Pastor Fr. Paul Riley was informed and exposed the relic for veneration to the group. For a time, this tour group included St. Stephen's Parish in their pilgrimage tours.

Saint Stephen, (died 36 ad, Jerusalem; feast day December 26), Christian deacon in Jerusalem and the first Christian martyr, whose apology before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7) points to a distinct strand of belief in primitive Christianity. His defense enraged his hearers, and he was taken out of the city and stoned to death.

Stephen is first mentioned in Acts of the Apostles as one of seven [deacons](#) appointed by the [Apostles](#) to distribute food and charitable aid to poorer members of the community in the early church. It may be assumed that Stephen was born Jewish, but nothing more is known about his previous life. The reason for the appointment of the deacons is stated to have been dissatisfaction among Greek-speaking (Hellenistic) Jews that their widows were being slighted in preference to

Hebraic ones in distribution of alms from the community funds. Since the name "Stephanos" is Greek, it has been assumed that he was one of these Hellenistic Jews. Stephen is stated to have been full of faith and the Holy Spirit and to have performed miracles among the people. It seems to have been among synagogues of Hellenistic Jews that he performed his teachings and "signs and wonders" since it is said that he aroused the opposition of the "[Synagogue of the Freedmen](#)", and "of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them that were of Cilicia and Asia". Members of these synagogues had challenged Stephen's teachings, but Stephen had bested them in debate. Furious at this humiliation, they presented false testimony that Stephen had preached blasphemy against [Moses](#) and God, and dragged him to appear before the [Sanhedrin](#), the supreme legal court of Jewish elders, accusing him of preaching against the Temple and the [Mosaic Law](#). Stephen is said to have been unperturbed, his face looking like "that of an angel".

In a long speech to the [Sanhedrin](#) comprising almost the whole of Acts Chapter 7, Stephen presents his view of the history of [Israel](#). The God of glory, he says, appeared to [Abraham](#) in [Mesopotamia](#), thus establishing at the beginning of the speech one of its major themes that God does not dwell only in one particular building (meaning the Temple). God was with [Joseph](#), too, in Egypt. Stephen recounts the stories of the [patriarchs](#) in some depth, and goes into even more detail in the case of [Moses](#). God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and inspired Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Nevertheless, the Israelites turned to other gods. This establishes the second main theme of Stephen's speech, Israel's disobedience to God. Stephen faced two accusations: that he had declared that Jesus would destroy the Temple in Jerusalem and that he had changed the customs of Moses. The Roman Catholic Church states that St. Stephen appealed to the Jewish scriptures to prove how the laws of Moses were not subverted by Jesus but, instead, were being fulfilled. He denounces his listeners as "stiff-necked" people who, just as their ancestors had done, resist the Holy Spirit. "Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him."

Thus castigated, the account is that the crowd could contain their anger no longer. However Stephen, seemingly now oblivious to them, looked up and cried "Look! I see heaven open and the [Son of Man](#) standing on the right hand of God!" To the Sanhedrin, this claim that the recently executed Jesus was standing by the side of God was such intense blasphemy that they rushed upon Stephen, drove him outside the city to the place appointed, and stoned him. At this time Jewish law permitted the death penalty by stoning for blasphemy. The witnesses, whose duty it was to throw the first stones, laid their coats down so as to be able to do this, at the feet of a "young man named Saul", later to be known as [Paul the Apostle](#). Stephen prayed that the Lord would receive his spirit and his killers be forgiven, sank to his knees, and "fell asleep". Saul "approved of their killing him".

Numerous parallels between the accounts of Stephen in Acts and the [Jesus](#) of the [Gospels](#) – they both perform miracles, they are both tried by the Sanhedrin, they both pray for forgiveness for their killers, for instance – have led to suspicions that the author of Acts has emphasized or invented some or all of these. The criticism of traditional Jewish belief and practice in Stephen's speech is very strong – when he says God does not live in a dwelling "made by human hands", referring to the Temple, he is using an expression often employed by Biblical texts to describe idols. The charge of anti-Judaism has been laid against the speech, for instance by the priest and scholar of comparative religion [S. G. F. Brandon](#), who states "The anti-Jewish polemic of this speech reflects the attitude of the author of Acts."

Acts 8:2 says "Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him", but the location where he was buried is not specified. In 415 AD a priest named Lucian purportedly had a dream that revealed the location of Stephen's remains at [Beit Jimal](#). After that the reputed relics of the martyr were said to be preserved in the Byzantine Church of St Stephen in Jerusalem, a church destroyed in the 12th century. A 20th-century French Catholic church, St Etienne, was built in its place, while another, Greek Orthodox Church of St Stephen was built at the opposite side of the city.