

## **Sermon: 2020/12/26 (St Stephen) - Jeremiah 26:1-9,12-15; Acts 6:8-7:2a,51c-60; Matthew 23:34-39\_BTR**

The feast-day of Stephen the deacon – the Church’s commemoration of his martyrdom, that is, rudely punctures - you might say, “*punctuates*” - the charming, *cheerful* “bubble” of Christmas:

One minute we’re celebrating a (miraculous) birth, and then, suddenly, barely 24 hours later, we’re reflecting on a murder.

It seems very out-of-place, doesn’t it?

- in this season of supposed peace and goodwill among men.

For, clearly, “peace and goodwill” was *precisely* the thing which was missing on that day long ago, when Stephen, a young, passionate *first-generation* Christian was dragged through the streets of Jerusalem by a mob and their priests, and agonisingly stoned to death.

So why don’t we postpone thinking about such things to later in the year?

Gloomy January might be a more suitable setting, right?

Do we really need to talk about it *now*?

About such awful *tragedy*?

And it isn’t, of course, the only traditional feast-day that seems so incongruous with the Hallmark movies on TV and jolly “Saint Nick.”

Don’t forget “Holy Innocents” on the 28th!

But perhaps reflecting on what happened to Stephen and to the little boys massacred in Bethlehem, is not only *not* obnoxious to the fundamental, underlying themes of Christmas, but *actually* serve to *deepen* our reason to be joyous:

They help to remind us that the *very* reason Jesus was born was not as a pretext to indulge and buy more *stuff*, but to bring evil and grief to an end.

They help to remind us that that incredible event in the stable proclaims; *proves* that tragedy has a time-limit.

That tragedy has an expiration date - just like all that rich food in our refrigerators at home.