

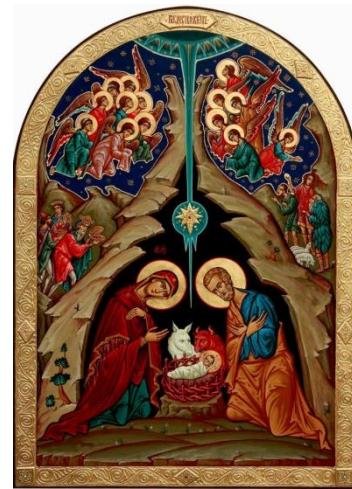
Festivals and Saints' Days (w/c 21st December)

25th December

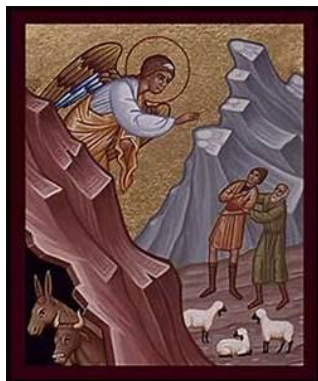
The Nativity of Christ/Christmas

Christmas is the feast of the Birth of Christ. The story is related in the Gospels:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrolment, when Quirin'i-us was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."



And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2: 1 - 20

See also John 1: 1 - 18 for a theological account of the Nativity.

Christmas Day has an octave (eight days) of celebration - though this is somewhat obscured by the sequence of saints' days, which fall during this time.



26th December



Saint Stephen - *martyr*

Saint Stephen is sometimes titled the *proto-martyr*, which means that he was the first martyr for the Christian Faith. His part in the life of the early Church is narrated in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 6 and 7.

He was chosen as one of seven men to organise the charitable activities of the early Church once the Apostles found that they had too much work. Some suggest that this group is the foundation of the later institution of the seven deacons in Rome. Stephen seems to have stood out and found himself in conflict with the Jewish authorities, who engineered his martyrdom by stoning. Saint Paul was a witness to his death.

His feast is commonly known as Boxing Day, because it was the day when the boxes for donations to the poor were opened and their contents distributed: the connexion with Stephen is not difficult to see.

27th December

Saint John the Evangelist - *Apostle, Evangelist*

Saint John is traditionally associated with the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, the three letters of John and the Book of the Apocalypse. He may also have been, "the disciple, whom Jesus loved." (John 13: 23; 20: 2; 21: 7, 20) Saint John is also one of the twelve Apostles and the only one who was not martyred for the Faith. He was possibly one of the pillars of the Jerusalem Church after the Resurrection; but Tradition has it that he was exiled to Patmos (where, if he was the author, he wrote the Book of the Apocalypse).

