

Date: January 8, 2021

Subject: BURL-Choir Nativity Forefeast and Holy Fathers Weekend NOTICE

Dorogiye!

This Saturday/Sunday, being after the Nativity of the Lord, the Church commemorates the Holy Righteous David the King, Joseph the Betrothed, and James the Brother of the Lord.

The attached Tropar/Kondak text sheet includes the special prayers that will be sung on Saturday at Vigil and Sunday at Liturgy.

Earlier, on Friday/Saturday, the Church commemorated Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen.

WE WISH O. STEFAN A BLESSED NAMESDAY (Den' Angela)!

Brief summaries about David the King, Joseph the Betrothed, and James the Brother of the Lord, and Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen are provided below.

\*\*\*\* DAVID THE KING, JOSEPH THE BETROTHED, AND JAMES THE BROTHER OF THE LORD

The Holy Prophet-King David, Saint Joseph the Betrothed, and Saint James the Brother of the Lord are commemorated on the Sunday after the Nativity.

At an early date, some churches in the East began to commemorate certain important figures of the New Testament at the time of Theophany, and later during the Nativity season. In Syria, for example, Saint Stephen, Saints James and John, and Saints Peter and Paul were commemorated near the end of December.

In Jerusalem, the saints mentioned above were combined with a feast that the Jews of Hebron celebrated on December 25 or 26 (o.s.) in honor of the Old Testament Patriarch Jacob. Later on, the Christians substituted Saint James for Jacob, and then the commemoration of the Brother of the Lord became associated with his ancestor King David. In time, Saint Joseph was linked with Saints David and James.

Saint Joseph had four sons from his previous marriage: James, Judah and Simon (or Symeon), and three daughters: Esther, Martha, and Salome, who was the mother of Saint John the Theologian.

\*\*\*\* PROTOMARTYR AND ARCHDEACON STEPHEN

The Holy Protomartyr and Archdeacon Stephen was the eldest of the seven deacons, appointed by the Apostles themselves, and therefore he is called "archdeacon." He was the first Christian martyr, and he suffered for Christ when he was about thirty. In the words of Asterias, he was "the starting point of the martyrs, the instructor of suffering for Christ, the foundation of righteous confession, since Stephen was the first to shed his blood for the Gospel."

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Saint Stephen preached Christianity and defeated Jewish teachers of the Law in debate. The Jews maligned Saint Stephen, saying that he had uttered blasphemy against God and against Moses. Saint Stephen came before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest to answer these charges. He gave a fiery speech, in which he recounted the history of the Jewish nation, and denounced the Jews for

persecuting the prophets, and also for executing the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

During his speech, Saint Stephen suddenly saw the heavens opened and Jesus Christ standing at the right hand of God. The Jews shouted and covered their ears, and rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and stoned him, but the holy martyr prayed for his murderers. Far off on the heights stood the Mother of God with the holy Apostle John the Theologian, and She prayed fervently for the martyr. Before his death Saint Stephen said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. O Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Then he joyfully gave up his pure soul to Christ.

The body of the holy Protomartyr Stephen, left to be eaten by beasts, was secretly taken up by the Jewish teacher Gamaliel and his son Habib, who buried Stephen on his estate. They both believed in Christ, and later received holy Baptism.