

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/27/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

***ONE AT ONE*** – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, December 28 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those countries experiencing political and civil unrest, especially, Afghanistan, Haiti, Myanmar, Israel and Palestine, China, and others. Ask God to inspire leaders to seek the good of all the people in their lands. Pray that the Holy Spirit might guide our paths into the way of peace.*

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Yesterday was December 26. You probably are well-aware of that. But there were several important remembrances on this day that perhaps have slipped by. I'd like to take a moment to share some of these items.

First, December 26 was not the "day after Christmas." It was the "Second day of Christmas." We're all aware of the song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Well, yesterday was the "two turtledoves" day. The season of Christmas in the church begins on December 25 with the birth of Christ and continues for twelve days until the Feast of the Epiphany which, on January 6, commemorates the arrival of the wise men. These twelve days are also called "Christmastide." Consider leaving your Christmas decorations up until Epiphany and celebrate the season of Christmas. Many folks do this anyway, though it's usually because they haven't "gotten around to taking the decorations down yet." This is a very good reason to leave them up a bit longer.

Second, December 26 is called "Boxing Day." Boxing Day began in the Middle Ages as a time to put donations or gifts in the "poor box" or "alms box" at church to help those who were in need, or to open the alms box and distribute the funds to the poor on this day. The practice of giving Christmas bonuses to employees has its roots in Boxing Day. In many countries, it has become a significant shopping day, though without the title of "Boxing Day," similar to "Black Friday," the day after Thanksgiving.

Third, December 26 is the Feast of St. Stephen, commemorating the first Christian martyr. The Book of Acts in chapters 7 and 8 tells how Stephen, "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit," was arrested and subsequently stoned to death after his Christian witness before the Jewish leaders. The Eastern Orthodox Church holds this commemoration on December 27. St. Stephen's Day is an important day in the church for remembering all those throughout history who have been martyred for their faith. They are also remembered on December 28, which is the Feast of Holy Innocents. The Christmas song "Good King Wenceslaus" includes the words that the good king looked out "on the Feast of Stephen." This is the origin of that line.

Christmas is not over. In fact, the season, at least for the church, has truly just begun. Though the world around us is now rushing towards New Year's Day, we are in the Season of Christmas. Continue to gather with family and friends. Continue to enjoy the celebration of the birth of Christ and what His coming means for our world.

In Christ's love,  
Pastor Jeffrey