God’s church in Jerusalem grew larger as more and more people came to faith in the Savior. Soon the church became so large that the disciples could not keep up with all the work that needed to be done.

The believers then chose seven men to help the disciples. These men were to take care of the many poor people in the church. One of the seven was a man named Stephen.

Stephen did more than take care of the poor. With the help of God, he did many miracles. He also taught people that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior.

Some people who hated Jesus did not like what Stephen said and did. They tried to stop Stephen from preaching. They got some men to tell lies about Stephen. When the Jewish leaders heard these lies, they believed them. The leaders arrested Stephen and brought him into the temple to go on trial before the high priest.

There Stephen’s enemies told more lies about him. They said, “This man keeps saying terrible things about the temple and God’s law. We have even heard him say that Jesus will tear down this holy temple and will change the laws that Moses gave to us!”

The high priest asked Stephen, “Are the things these men say about you true?”

Stephen answered, “All of you, listen to me. In the past God sent many prophets to the people of Israel to tell them about the Savior who would come. These prophets kept telling the people to believe in this Savior.

“But the people of Israel did not listen to God’s prophets and did not believe their message of the Savior. You are just like them. In fact, you are doing the very same thing right now! Just as the people of Israel killed many of God’s prophets, you killed God’s Son, Jesus, the promised Savior, when God sent him to you.”

When the Jewish leaders heard these words, they were very angry with Stephen. Just then, God let Stephen look up into heaven. “Look!” Stephen said. “I can see into heaven. There is Jesus, standing right next to God!”

Stephen’s enemies became so angry that they shouted and covered their ears with their hands. Then they grabbed him and dragged him out of the city.

There they picked up large stones and began to throw them at Stephen as hard as they could. As stone after stone hit Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, take my soul to heaven with you.” Then, as the stones knocked him to the ground, Stephen cried out, “Lord, forgive
these men for this sin.” After he said this prayer for his enemies, Stephen died.

Some friends of Stephen took his body and buried it. They were very sad that he was dead.

But a man named Saul had watched the enemies kill Stephen and was glad he was dead. Saul did not believe in Jesus and began to arrest those who did. Because of this, many of the believers left Jerusalem and went to other towns to tell people about Jesus. God blessed their work, and the church continued to grow.

The Holy Spirit gave Stephen and the other believers courage to keep telling others about Jesus, even when it was very difficult. We trust the Holy Spirit will give us the same courage to speak boldly about our Savior.

1. Have you ever been on the phone with a friend or relative who doesn’t know about Jesus? It might be hard to start up a conversation about the Savior. Before you talk to that person again, think of a beginning sentence, such as “Let me tell you something neat I learned in Sunday school.” Pray to the Holy Spirit for courage and the right words to speak.

2. The words of Matthew 28:20b reassure you that you are never alone when you tell others about Jesus. Look up and read that passage, write the words on a note card, and put it on a mirror in your home. Whenever you see the passage, remember that God is always with you.

Pray Together

Dear Spirit, fill my heart with love
For Jesus, my dear Lord above.
When I’m afraid, please make me brave
To tell the world that Jesus saves. Amen.

* Matthew 28:20b

Hymn 200:1

A mighty fortress is our God,
A trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev’ry need
That has us now o’ertaken.
The old evil foe
Now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might
Are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.