

Saint Bartholomew's News

2015 December

Words from Reverend Wendy

Dear Wonderful St. Bart's:

Happy New Year and Blessed Christmas to you and to yours! AND no, your Rector has not lost her marbles—well perhaps a few. Our church year begins each year at the beginning of Advent, so we



prepare for the annual commemoration of the birth of Christ during early and mid-December, and then we celebrate the birthday on December 25. Sadly, the holiday has become all too commercial and the lights and reindeer and Santas overshadow the real reason we celebrate this season and day.

One sermon I once heard asked whether people realized Santa was not at the manger with baby Jesus. And the romanticized story of Jesus in a manger may sound welcoming, but it was likely in a barn attached to a home that did not smell nice and sweet. Perhaps the reason someone brought all those nice smelling presents was because the smell was so bad. We tend to make up a happier and rosier story than the actual difficult trek this small family had to make for purposes of census taking. Can you imagine if you had to return to your birthplace when the U.S. Census was most recently being taken?

This year we can do a better job of remembering the story by taking time to sit and reflect. We are spending time in scripture with art work as we consider “A Thrill of Hope—The Christmas Story in Word and Art.” This novel presentation of the story is beautifully illustrated in the artwork of John August Swanson, who was influenced by his Mexican mother and Swedish father. He uses visual narratives to tell stories of the Bible.

As you sit down with family and enjoy this festive season, try to remember Jesus was born of humble beginnings, and His story is one of hope and peace for all of us. I am blessed to have been called to serve as your Rector and I offer Christmas Blessings to each of you.

May the Lord Bless and keep each of you in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Love and Peace,

-Rev. Wendy

Barks from Brother Brownie

Dear Friends:

Some of you may have seen my bandage. Especially after hearing the Rev tell some of you I had been bested by a measly raccoon, I thought I would set the record straight.

I realized an important truth recently when I was nearly killed right at home. Sometimes even the creatures I hold in low regard make me remember we are all creatures on this planet, and even across species we can still help each other out. The old Jesus instruction to love one another saved my life the other day. It's not everyday you have your life saved by creatures you find just plain silly looking... and stupid. It started like every other day, with me on patrol.

Most mornings I patrol the perimeter of the property to ensure there have been no breaches overnight. I enjoy the early dawn

hours with the dew still on the grass, as it makes the scents much more pronounced.

Mmmm that is a "freshy" donkey leaving—think I will grab a nibble to keep up my strength on patrol. Ah and a little warm still. Nothing better to start my morning. And even though I can't stand donkeys—or long ears as I have always called them—their leavings are one thing I like about them. So I was finishing up a little snack and I found myself wondering, *what's that smell—smells like cat but a little different?*

I started trotting a little faster after the whiff of different cat. The front pasture looked clear with not much going on except the cars whooshing by on the other side of the fence. Those early morning humans off to places they must get quickly so they can hurry and work and get back in their cars and hurry and get back to their friend dogs at home. Never understood the human need to hurry everywhere when they could just as well dig a hole in the cool dirt and sunbathe for a little while, or maybe roll in the freshly mown grass and shake all the clippings off.

Anyway, I caught a thicker smell of cat as I rounded the corner to the back pasture past the red shed where cats sometimes hide. I inspected a little closer. Nothing was there but the smell. It was definitely cat, but not any of the cats that hang around humans. As head of security, I just had to investigate this a little closer.

I followed the scent along the fence line and came to a stand of trees with a lot of brush and undergrowth. I poked my nose in and got all sorts of smells—an old stinky possum, at least two different snakes, an armadillo. Armadillos. Now that's a weird animal. They are slow and smell horrible like musty cheese, and where they should

have fur they have a shell like a turtle. I know. Weird, right? I have learned not to mess with them, as there's not much you can do besides bark at them. And even that does not seem to faze them much. Maybe they're deaf.

So I trotted on down the fence line where there are several big tree limbs down across the fence. I had to shimmy under a log here and there, and the cat smell was getting stronger. I thought I saw a form dart in front of me—you know, running from the law—so I put on the afterburners and took off in hot pursuit. When I caught up, I realized I was looking at the biggest cat I have ever seen. It was bigger than me and sure didn't look like any of the soft and lazy cats around the house.

Just then it looked back at me—much like a housecat would—and puffed all up and made the most obnoxious sound. It was almost a scream, and it was loud. And this was one big cat, I tell you.

Please understand that I am no wimp. Cats don't scare me. And I have learned over the years how to handle them. If they run—well, let's just say that's all she wrote. Not to brag, but I have perfected my technique. And lest any of you get all cat-lover on me—this is one great technique, quick and painless for the cat, or coon, or possum—anything that runs. They never feel a thing.

The problem was I couldn't use my perfect technique with this thing because it was as tall as me. And if I can't get the back of the neck, I know from years of perfecting my approach that there are always claws and teeth that will soon follow.

Oh yea, the old Rev hates it when I use my technique. I mean really—how can she

stand those things? And I leave the ones alone that are brave enough to just look me in the eye. I mean, I kind of respect that in them. So I let them be.

So this big old cat had me confounded. And it was not running. As a matter of fact, it had a weird look in its eyes. I have to say I am a pretty brave guy. Not much scares me, especially not cats. But this particular cat was just a little scary. But I'm head of security, right.? Right. My pride and sense of duty kicked in. Slowly, I advanced. It growling and looking at me and then I realized it was walking toward me just as I was walking toward it. Can you believe that?

I realized I had a situation here. Well we all know the best way to deal with a situation is to turn the aggressive knob up a notch. So I put on my most vicious snarl and bark (also hoping to alert my buddies back at the house to come help me). I moved towards the growling beast and thought I needed to move in quickly and try to grab its neck.

I lunged forward and thwack! It smacked me with sharp claws deep down in my ear—I was knocked back but the adrenaline kicked in and I advanced again. My ear was bleeding all over the place. That thing was strong and mean. So I turned the aggression knob even higher. I leapt at the thing, trying to pounce with my front legs so I could get it down and get a good grip on its neck.

The next thing I knew, that thing clamped down with some particularly sharp teeth on my front leg. I went down on the ground feeling the teeth go all the way to the bone. The worst part is that it wouldn't let go! I was in the vise of teeth and things were not looking good for me. I realized all that cat had to do was shift the bite to my neck and

I was a goner. I'm not ashamed to say my heart was pumping.

What happened next will be etched in my memory forever. There I was, helpless and beaten and held down and all panicky inside, and then I saw them. My rescuers. It wasn't my pack... or the humans... or even my best friend the Rev... Can you believe the dudes coming to help me out were the long ears? There they were—a trotting pair of miniature Mediterranean donkeys. The long ears came on us in a full gallop and in that moment the cat released the hold on my leg. I jumped up to get the heck out of there, and that nasty old cat clawed my haunch, too! Then the long ears started that crazy braying they do that usually makes me nuts. I have never been so happy to hear that braying and to see those long pointy ears aimed at that awful, awful cat.

The cat jumped back and ran. The long ears gave chase, and the last thing I saw as I was streaking for the house was the cat's bobbed tail slipping under the square wire mesh of the fence.

When I got to the house, still at a full run, I jumped through the dog door, leaving a bloody trail behind me. For the rest of the day I lay low. Later that afternoon, the man noticed me limping and then when the Rev came home she freaked. And rightly so. I mean, I had been traumatized, I tell you.

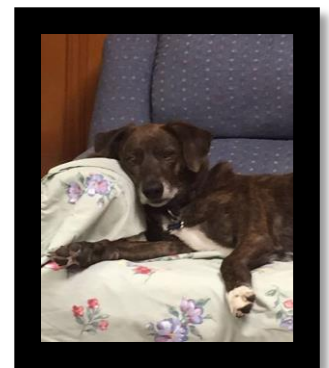
She was in a panic and put me in the car and drove crazy all the way to that place I hate—the place full of shots and weird, weird smells. Next thing I knew I was separated from my best friend, the Rev, and taken to a big room that smelled like medicine and pretty soon I started feeling really sleepy.

I awoke in that stinky place, but pretty soon I was reunited with the Rev, who had calmed down a bit. I would have told her everything if I just had a chance. But you know, sometimes people don't take the time to listen. They just act.

So I started on a bunch of disgusting pills and I had to wear a big bandage on my leg and I got a few stitches in my ear. I was not too happy about all those pills and going back the very next day for a new bandage. The Rev took over bandage duty, which required I stand in a humiliating position in a big sink at the Rev's sister's house. I did like that better than being made all sleepy all the time, though.

And you know—Jesus was right when he put that cross on the back of those long ears after they carried Him in Jerusalem. He used that cross as a way to thank the long ears. And today, even though I still chase them, I have a new special love in my heart for the little donkeys who saved the life of an old hook tailed hound like me. Perhaps we need to do a better job loving even those who are different than we are... even the long ears. You just never know—you may need saving one day, too.

Blessed Christmas Friends,



Announcements

- ❖ If you did not get a newsletter in the mail for November please let Cathy know. Also, all newsletter submissions need to be turned in on the 15th of each month to Aubrey.
- ❖ Sunday pew bulletins and inserts can be taken home with you. If you miss a Sunday and would like that pew bulletin please let Cathy know and we will be sure to get it to you.
- ❖ No yoga on the 22nd.
- ❖ **CONFIRMATION!!** January 3rd! There will also be a reception afterwards.
- ❖ January 3rd: the undesignated offering is for the Bishop's Discretionary Fund. All checks should be made to the Episcopal Diocese, noting: Bishop Harrison's Discretionary Fund.
- ❖ As Bishop Harrison will be in town, she will be:
 - Meeting with confirmands before the service
 - Meeting with the vestry for reports on goals, challenges, and accomplishments
 - Viewing the Parish Registers and Safeguarding God's Children Files.

Confirmation Class 2015:

Confirmation Date, **Sunday January 3, 2016 at 10:00 AM**; please add this important date to your calendar now.

Bishop Dena Harrison will be confirming this class and you will meet with her before the Confirmation to meet her and let her get to know you.

Alexander Rodriguez III,
Allyson Rodriguez,
Madison Rodriguez,
& Melissa Rodriguez

will be confirmed on the first
Sunday of January.



Lay Ministry

Lay Ministry is subject to change.

Sunday 12/6

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Altar Guild | Volunteer, Volunteer |
| Chalice Bearer | Gerald Ladig |
| Lesson Lector | Helen Panetti |
| Prayer Lector | Susan Ashley-Lafitte |
| Acolyte | Skye Youngblood |
| Ushers | Charles Menke, Darrell Lafitte |

Sunday 12/13

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Altar Guild | Volunteer, Volunteer |
| Chalice Bearer | Bobby Drew |
| Lesson Lector | Lee French |
| Prayer Lector | Nancy Wilson |
| Ushers | Gerald Ladig, Tom Scholl |
| Acolyte | Aubrey French |

Sunday 12/20

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| Altar Guild | Volunteer, Volunteer |
| Chalice Bearer | Gerald Ladig |
| Lesson Lector | Nancy Wilson |
| Acolyte | Aubrey French |
| Prayer Lector | Helen Panetti |
| Ushers | Charles Menke, Tom Scholl |

Sunday 12/27

| | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| Altar Guild | Volunteer, Volunteer |
| Chalice Bearer | Charles Menke |
| Lesson Lector | Susan Ashley-Lafitte |
| Prayer Lector | Nancy Wilson |
| Ushers | Volunteers |
| Acolyte | Volunteer |

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979-826-2525

St. Bartholomew Episcopal Church
811 14th Street
Hempstead, Texas 77445

At the corner of Austin and 14th

Rev'd Wendy:

revwend@gmail.com

Cathy Nettles (Sec.):

cathybec@gmail.com

Aubrey (Editor):

frenchaubrey7@gmail.com

If you have any suggestions or ideas that you would like to be in the newsletter, email Aubrey.



December Calendar

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|--|-----|--|-----|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | | 1 -Crafts- 10:00 Birthday: Jen Vines -YOGA- | 2 | 3 -Meals on Wheels- 10:00 Birthday: Abbey Rodriguez | 4 | 5 Birthday: Richard Johnson |
| 6 -Service- 10:00 | 7 | 8 -Crafts- 10:00 -YOGA- | 9 | 10 -Meals on Wheels- 10:00 | 11 Birthday: Johnnie Mathis | 12 |
| 13 -Service- 10:00 | 14 | 15 -Crafts- 10:00 -YOGA- | 16 | 17 -Meals on Wheels- 10:00 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 -Service- 10:00 Birthday: Jeff Flukinger | 21 | 22 -Crafts- 10:00 Birthday: Dylan Mills | 23 | 24 -Meals on Wheels- 10:00 Christmas Eve! | 25 Christmas! | 26 |
| 27 -Service- 10:00 | 28 | 29 -Crafts- 10:00 -YOGA- | 30 | 31 | | |

Annual Report: 2015

As 2015 draws to an end and our new church year begins, it is always a good idea to look back at our year together and consider our bright future. Most of you will recall the year started without a Rector as your beloved Rev. Bob Merrill was called to new ministries in far off lands. After a few months with supply and interim clergy, you called me from St. John's Marlin to serve as your new Rector. I was honored and overjoyed to accept the call.

We started together in Holy Week. On my first day, Palm Sunday, we held a funeral for Mrs. Haack with more than 200 people in attendance. I was so happy to see the community members gathered to bid farewell to one of our own. We hope Colt and his family will come and see us from time to time. We had a glorious Holy Week together and we have not stopped running since that week.

We have been working to find out which ministries we are called to in our community, and which ministries our community needs. By assessing our own talents we are best able to serve those needs we find in our community. We have had lots of fun with our new newsletter editor, Aubrey French, who many may not realize is a High School freshman, and not in fact a corporate vice president of communications. He's pretty amazing, and that is a talent we are so proud of.

Before I was called as Rector, the ECW decided it would be best to take a year off from the community-wide Turkey Dinner. The ECW membership has decreased and the number of helping hands meant there was too much of a load on too few. So we

held a Turkey Pardon in conjunction with the Blessing of the Pets (which we co-sponsored with the local rescue group 4-Paws Rescue). We all watched our own Aubrey win Grand Champion Turkey at the Waller County Fair with his HUGE bird.

Our own Verger, Susan, has made so many things run smoothly, from funerals to weekly services to unusual services the Rector sometimes dreams up. Among those strange services we experimented with is Yoga Eucharist, in which we combined prayer and body stretching and Eucharist. We had fun and may keep doing it into 2016, even though some of us are tired of being shown up by the 70+ crowd who are much more limber and flexible!!

Our music ministry is so vibrant with our own Ann at the organ, and we so appreciate her weekly service allowing us to have live music and to switch from our Hymnal to LEVAS with ease. Our children's Sunday school is headed by our own Kay who selflessly prepares lessons. Some weeks Kay faithfully teaches more than a dozen children about the Bible and the love of Christ.

Our Vestry has been vigilant as our community came under the national microscope with the death of Sandra Bland in our jail in Hempstead. This tragic death meant we needed to remind people we are a community of love and caring, and we will continue to redouble our efforts to keep peace in this community.

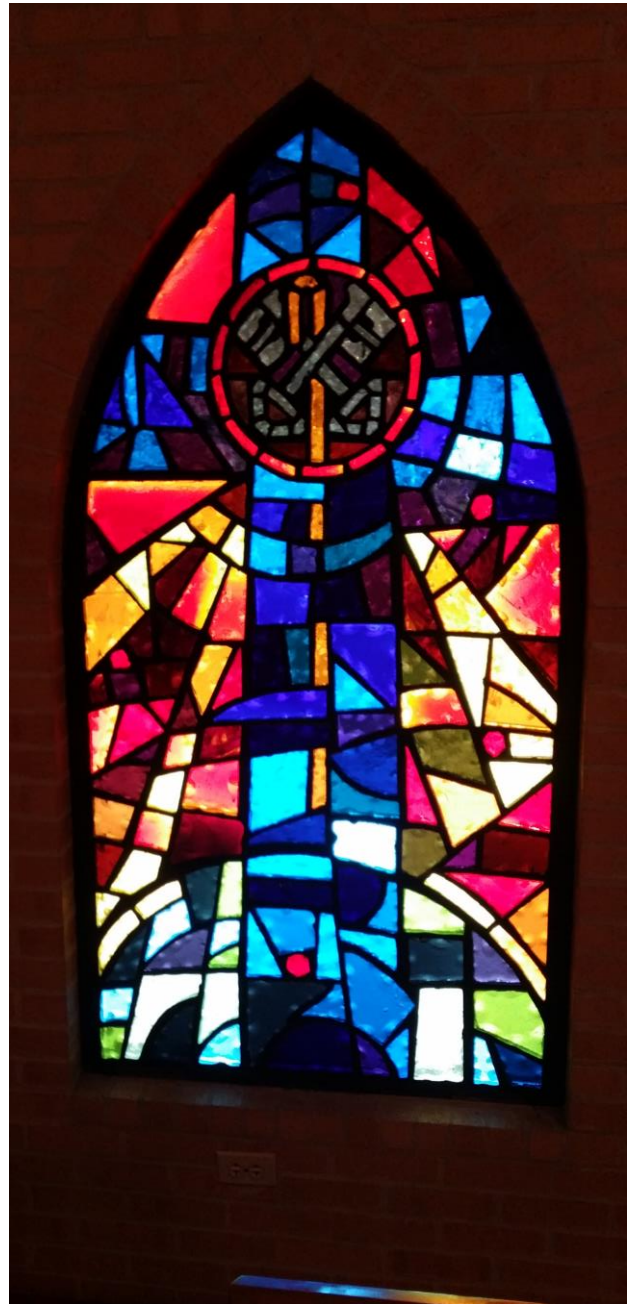
Cathy keeps our pew bulletins fresh and beautiful each week, and assists Susan, our new treasurer, and Aubrey with reports and newsletter distribution. We appreciate her cheerful spirit and hard work.

The church is small, but don't let that fool you. We still manage to get things done. We host elections in our parish hall, hold weekly crafts group in our library, manage weekly meetings for Meals on Wheels on our grounds, hold AARP Meetings in the Parish Hall, conduct weekly Yoga Eucharist in the Parish Hall, and more. Everyone has a ministry in this church. All you have to do is look around on Sunday or any day of the week to see Glynn removing gutters for repair of the underlying wood, Gerald, Tom, Charlie, Bobby, and Susan serving at the altar as chalice bearers, Kay and Ann setting the altar along with Susan to make sure our altar is in order and beautiful each new season. Our readers read from the lectern each Sunday, and our acolytes serve with great excitement. There is not a single person who does not serve in some way, and that is what Christ calls each one of us to do. Christ, whose blessed birth we celebrate this month, gave his own life that each of us would be forgiven. So the least we can do is read, feed, teach, play, stretch, preach, write, walk, and whatever else needs to be done for our Savior.

When the Bishop visits on January 3, 2016, let's show her we're going places. What do you think? Where should we go?

Blessings for a safe and restful Christmas and amazing 2016.

-Rev. Wendy





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811 14th Street
Hempstead, Texas 77445