

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



A SHOW TO REMEMBER

A woman with dark hair and glasses is wearing a red and gold patterned robe over a white shirt. She is holding a white envelope and standing in front of a Christmas tree. The background includes a sign that says "ENTROPY" and a small Christmas tree with decorations.



“Rita plays to the kids’ strengths,” said Sharon Simmons. “She is an absolute jewel.”

Assistant director Colleen Holdcraft scared the audience out of its wits in her portrayal of the Emperor, literally shouting: “Go! Everyone go NOW!” Yikes. Soon after came Rita as Herod – who went bonkers after learning that another king had been born. Here’s the rest of the top-notch cast:

- Blake Simmons controlled the angel puppet. (See more about Blake below.)
- Ceilia Greeley and Graham Reece portrayed Mary and Joseph.
- Violet Greeley was both the innkeeper and the Wise Woman.
- Elliot Reece and Bastian Stover were shepherds tending Armand Stover, a cute sheep.
- Jonas Holdcraft joined his mom as one of Herod’s henchmen.

Pastor Tom had to fill in, too. He voiced the angel’s part, and he provided a soundtrack by singing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” during scene changes. He also put the wheels on the cool camel and horse that Rita had asked a friend to make for the occasion.



The second part of the program was beautiful. Rita and Colleen teamed up to dance the story of young Mary and her baby, while the choir sang “Mary, Did You Know?” Out in the audience, hearts melted. When Rita’s dancing, she said, “I feel like I am being directed by the Holy Spirit. It’s an amazing feeling.” *(Dance photo by Colin Hackley)*

Our attendance was roughly two dozen more than usual. What a program those people got to see. Many, many thanks to all involved.

Rita’s only regret, she said, was that after it all, when Ceilia presented flowers to her, she failed to share them with Colleen. “She deserved half of my bouquet,” Rita said. “I was so surprised and emotional that I took it without thinking.” Apart from that: “We did have a blast, and hope we can do it again.” *(You can watch the program on the St. Stephen Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee/>)*

ABOUT THAT ANGEL...

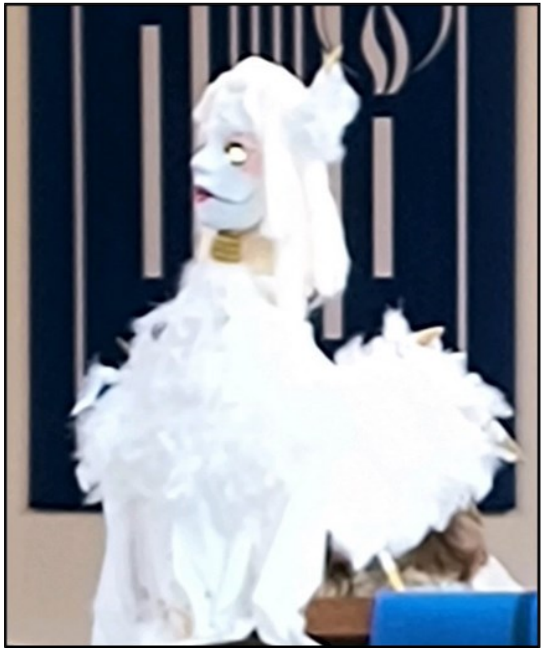
In our Christmas programs over the years, often we’ve had narrators speak as the Angel of the Lord while angelic little girls showed off their fluffy white wings. But we’ve never had an angel quite like the one we had Sunday. It was a puppet: 32 inches tall, 29 inches wide, from wingtip to wingtip.

It was created and operated by talented Blake Simmons, who during the program was crouching behind the altar. And this angel had a key speaking part, delivering important messages to Mary and Joseph, so the angel’s mouth had to move. The performance was flawless – but few of us in the audience knew how much work had gone into Blake’s angel.



About a year ago, independently of each other, Sharon Simmons (Blake’s grandmother) and Rita Ford had begun thinking that a puppet version of an angel might be perfect for the Christmas program. Sharon had seen Blake working on a puppet for her AP research project (pictured above) and asked what she thought of the angel idea. Blake liked it. So did Pastor Tom. Finding as much time as possible amid her senior-class studies and AP classes, Blake got to work. Off and on for three months, she labored to bring her angel (named Amalthea) to life. “She is indeed a genius,” Rita said. *(Angel photos by Sharon Simmons)*

The materials Blake used were wood, yarn, feathers and white satin, plus A white mask that she cut open and wired so the angel could speak convincingly. If you get close, as in the photo below, you'll see that the angel looks sort of regal – and sort of scary. That's accurate, Pastor Tom said: Blake did her angel homework. And she did some searching. She found those eyes, some sort of crystal, at JoAnn Fabrics.



She thought her angel's debut went smoothly. Next Christmas, though, Blake might not be around for the program. She's hoping to pursue a puppetry major at West Virginia University. One way or another, she intends to pursue puppetry.

For now, though, Blake's angel is living at Grandma Sharon's house – and, thank goodness, will be available for future Christmas programs.



EXTRA! A PEEK BEHIND THE SCENES

By Colleen Holdcraft

If I said it once, I said it a hundred times: “If it weren’t for Rita, we wouldn’t have a children’s Christmas program!” Rita has been the impetus behind making this program happen. She wrote the play, recruited the children, arranged rehearsal times, and even provided rides for some of the kids to and from rehearsals. She asked her roommate to make the donkey and camel way back in October; Tarrance added the fake grass at the bottom. Sometimes, Rita rehearsed multiple times on a Saturday because she wanted to accommodate everyone’s unique schedules. So for these reasons and more, Rita was the director and the producer.



I did my best to show up to rehearsals on Sunday mornings right after communion and the two dress rehearsals. Originally, I was going to play Joseph. Thankfully, right after Thanksgiving, Graham’s schedule opened up enough that he was able to make rehearsals and take over the role – much to the delight of Mary (Ceilia). I learned later that Ceilia had been struggling internally with my being Joseph because I wasn’t a boy (haha). We never really had anyone rehearsing the role of soldier, so I took it. At one point in rehearsals, we added the removal of Herod’s deceased body. This addition was wildly popular with many of the young actors. But since we didn’t have enough time for costume changes, we had to nix the number of soldiers. It was at this point that I mentioned the role of soldier to Jonas. I think the clincher for him was the fact that there were no speaking parts. It was Pastor Tom who thought of the soldier costumes that we wore. He found them in the back of a closet where Wesley’s old dance attire still lives.

Someone else originally was slated to portray Herod, and Rita would just rehearse the lines when he wasn’t there. But truthfully, Rita’s lines as Herod were our favorite parts when we rehearsed. We’d all be on the sidelines whispering to each other, “Get ready. Here comes the best part!” We shared so many belly laughs thanks to Herod’s performance! In the end, Rita got to keep that role because the other actor declined.

Violet picked “O Little Town of Bethlehem” for us to sing together at the end of the program. There had been talk that instead of the congregation singing “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” we’d have Graham, Elliot and Bastian on their prospective instruments. Rita and I couldn’t say no, but parents said maybe next year. So now I think we should encourage these young musicians to perform in our February talent show!



You've already read about Blake's amazing angel. Blake proved to be impeccably reliable in showing up for both Saturday dress rehearsals and the last-minute one at 9:00 on the morning of the program. To be truthful, it was her grandmother (Sharon) who made it possible because she was the chauffeur.

Pastor Tom's filling in for the angel speaking roles should not go unnoticed. As he was usually present for the rehearsals, he was very familiar with the

script. He filled in and practiced the role at our last Saturday dress rehearsal. So, when I had to slip into Sunday-morning Bible study to request his presence at our 9:00 rehearsal, he didn't hesitate. Beth Alexander said it well after our service on Sunday: "That Pastor Tom is always there when you need him."

As Rita said: "We really have a good team at our church!" From my viewpoint and observations, all the people involved in this program had fun and even want to do it again next year. But I think we'll need a new shepherd next time: Bastian has his eye on a new role that involves speaking. A star is born!

A GIFT OF WARMTH AT A HOMELESS SHELTER

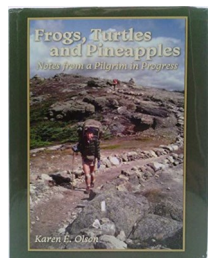
By Karen E. Olson (Excerpt from the Dec. 25, 1988, edition of the Tallahassee Democrat)

... It was at 2:30 p.m. on Dec. 9 that police brought in a 22-year-old Maryland man named Wayne. He arrived wearing jeans and a thin sweatshirt, saying he'd been robbed by his traveling companions and kicked out of the car. "He was just freezing cold, he was shivering," recalled volunteer Terri Stagner, vicar of St. Stephen Lutheran Church [in 1988-89]. "We gave him a blanket and he wrapped up in it instantly."

A few hours later, during a pre-dawn smoke break, Wayne described his predicament to a 44-year-old Tennessee man who has had a few scrapes with the law. "He [the older man] was pretty crazy, really," Stagner said. "He called himself the Rev. John and preached a lot and carried a Bible."

In addition to his Bible, as it turned out, the Rev. John was carrying two old coats – one of brown tweed and one of grey polyester. Without hesitation, he gave the grey one to Wayne.

You'll find this and more of Karen's stories in the book "Frogs, Turtles and Pineapples: Notes From a Pilgrim in Progress," available at church or from Karen



PASTOR TOM'S SUNDAY WELCOME

There's something about a youth Sunday or pageant Sunday that mends the broken world. Not only because the children's performances make us smile ... there's that, but also the loving-kindness of the assembly. We will bend close to listen and be attentive to a story passed down from age to age. Like holding a shell to our ear or putting our hand on the earth, we hear the breath and feel the pulse of Mother Earth. It is on days like today that we sense a mending of the broken world. The children and older kids offer themselves and we accept them graciously. We all offer ourselves to God, who accepts us graciously. It means something. It all counts.



HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

Sunday, Dec. 24, 10 a.m.: Fourth Sunday of Advent worship.

Sunday, Dec. 24, 7 p.m.: Christmas Eve service.

Monday, Dec. 25: Church office closed.

Sunday, Dec. 31, 10 a.m.: Lessons and Carols.



COMING UP LATER

Jan. 21: Congregational meeting.

Jan. 28: Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday.

Feb. 11: Mardi Gras Talent Show.



BEFORE YOU GO...

- Thanks to the dozen or so people who showed up to decorate the sanctuary Saturday morning. That's Pastor Tom on the ladder, hoisting a star into position above the altar. Thanks, too, to Mark Warren – who not only picked out the Christmas tree but installed it, with Pastor Tom's help. *(Photo above by Beth Alexander)*
- Among the nine (nine!) women at choir rehearsal Wednesday evening was St. Stephen alumna Sophie Treanor, who's visiting her dad, Jim. Look for her in the soprano section during Sunday's liturgy .
- Karl Barton's flute and Katharine Gossman's piano sounded especially beautiful Sunday during "Comfort, My People."
- Because we had so many visitors Sunday, it was fun to see worshippers sitting somewhere other than their usual spots.
- Here's one of the memorable prayers we offered up Sunday: "Fill us with laughter and shouts of joy as we bear witness to the great things you have done, O God. Give your church a spirit of gladness as we gather and as we are sent." Amen.
- No newsletter next week! The entire editorial staff is taking a break. Many thanks to Office Manager Lori Zengel for her assistance all year.
- If you have an anniversary, birthday, special memory or special St. Stephen person or program you'd like to honor, celebrate by sponsoring the altar flowers for our service. Sign up on the flower chart in the narthex. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS



Pastor Tom - 12/29
Kate Stuart - 12/29
Mike Martinez - 12/30
Linda Eshleman - 01/04
Lynn Gunderson - 01/04
Karen Olson - 01/05
Vince Muchuruza - 01/07
Marsy Miller - 01/10
Mary Andersen - 01/11
Mason Bonfanti - 01/11
Sharon Gordon - 01/11
Erin Kenney - 01/11
Mark Canning - 01/13
Nathan Basford - 01/19
Myrna Dowdell - 01/21
Stephen Barton - 01/22
Denise Bookwalter - 01/22
Ann Hingst - 01/22
James Gunderson - 01/24
Sandy Ness - 01/24
Gladys Kane - 01/28
Jennifer Buchanan - 01/29
Graham Hackley - 01/30
Warren Schave - 01/31
Jayden Schiffer - 01/31

IN THE WEEK AHEAD

Today:

Noon - Al-Anon meets in fellowship hall (FH)

7 p.m. - AA meets in FH

This Friday:

9:30 a.m. - TOPS meets in FH

This Sunday:

9:00 a.m. - Book study

9:30 a.m. - Choir practice

10 a.m. - Worship, Fourth Sunday of Advent

7 p.m. - Christmas Eve Candlelight service

Monday, Dec. 25:

Office closed

Wednesday, Dec. 27:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH



If you have news or photos to share,
please send them to Lori at
sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.

Don't forget our Facebook page:
<https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee>.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA
2198 N. Meridian Road | Tallahassee, FL 32303

The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor