

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
Saint Bartholomew  
August 24, 2025  
rmcneely+

Today is the day set aside by the Church to consider Saint Bartholomew.

It is a feast day.

One we celebrate in red to mark his martyrdom.

In the Anglican expression of Christianity

We are reserved in our celebration of the Saints.

You will find the list of them in your Prayer Books

At page Roman numeral 50 and 51.

The list includes the Apostles

Mary, mother of Christ

Michael the Archangel

Stephen, deacon and martyr

John, the Baptist, and

Paul

A fairly exclusive list, don't you think.

We leave to our Roman cousins

Their elaborate work of identifying others.

To date, they have some 10,000 saints

And more coming all the time.

We study them and are free to seek their intercession.

They are a fascinating lot.

Rich in history and sacrifice and example.

They enhance our lives.

There was a time

Before mass media and the entertainment industry

When they were the superheroes of their day.  
 They were not creations of fantasy with imaginary powers  
 And imaginary lives.  
 They were people, actual people  
     Who lived real lives.  
 They were the examples of a life well lived.  
 They were the people that others emulated,  
 The examples of virtue and courage.

Many of them were well known,  
     There were songs and poems written about them.  
     People knew their stories  
         Their sacrifices and accomplishments.  
 Cities and towns were named for them.  
 Look around you today here in the Bay Area  
     Our own city named for St Francis.  
     San Jose for Saint John  
     San Mateo for St Matthew  
     And on and on.  
 Names to honor and remind us of them.  
     We are steeped in their heritage.

The Church has assigned feast days for the Saints in our Prayer  
 Book  
     August 24<sup>th</sup> for St Bartholomew  
     December 22<sup>nd</sup> for our own St Thomas  
 Here at St Thomas,  
     when those dates fall on a Sunday, we celebrate them  
     With a Communion Service.

So today we remember and honor St Bartholomew  
     One of the original 12 Apostles that Jesus ordained.

Bartholomew is among the group of Apostles who have only brief  
 mention in the New Testament.

There are 4 lists of the 12 Apostles in the Bible

Bartholomew is in each list.

Sixth in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke

Seventh in the list contained in the Acts of the Apostles.

In the Gospel of St John, he is not named as Bartholomew

John names him Nathaniel.

A side light about Hebrew names;

The prefix “Bar” means “son of” in Aramaic and Hebrew.

So the name Bartholomew means son of Tolomai.

And is more of a title than a name.

John uses the name “Nathaniel” rather than the title “Bartholomew”

However, there is little doubt he is referring to the same man.

There is little scriptural evidence of Bartholomew

However second century historians

Wrote of him and it is through their efforts

That we can learn a little about him.

He was likely born and raised and was a citizen of Cana.

The place of Jesus’ first miracle

And a small town, within a day’s walk from the smaller town

Nazareth, where Jesus was raised.

We don’t know when he was born and we don’t know the date of his death.

History never recorded it.

We don’t know how he made his living but we have some knowledge of how he met his end.

More on that later.

Bartholomew makes one cameo appearance in the New Testament

It is recorded in the Gospel of St John (1:43).

It seems that Bartholomew was a friend of the Apostle Philip.

One day, Philip excitedly says to Bartholomew

Hey Nate!

we have found Him whom Moses, in the law

And the Prophets did write.

He is Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

The Messiah!

But Nate (our Bartholomew) is nonplussed.

He delivers one of the all time sarcastic Biblical lines:

“How could there any good come out of Nazareth?”

Now, I’m guessing that there is a good natured rivalry between  
Little town Cana and little town Nazareth.

But that’s just a guess.

Philip is an interesting man too.

It seems his mission is to literally and physically

bring people to Jesus.

It was Philip for example who brought the young man  
with the bread and fish to Jesus for the miracle feeding.

So Philip doesn’t respond to the sarcasm with disdain

He does not argue with his friend Nate

He says:

“Come and see.”

Come and see for yourself.

What a good response

A good example for us in our own evangelical work.

Come and see for yourself.

An open and kind gesture.

Implicit in trust both in Jesus and in Nate himself.

And Jesus saw Nate walking toward Him,

Jesus said a curious thing about this man Nate,

Whom Jesus had not yet met as far as we know.  
Jesus said of Nate:

“Behold an Israelite indeed,  
in whom is no guile!”.

In modern terms:

Here is a Jew  
Without deceit, without cunning or sly manipulation.  
A true and honest man.

Nate asks the logical question:

Do you know me? Have we met?

Jesus gives this enigmatic response;

“Before that Philip called thee  
When thou wast under the fig tree,  
I saw thee.”

Fig tree?

What fig tree?

Learned scholars have pondered this very question for centuries.

Here is one explanation.

We have to go back to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Before Christ.

To Zechariah, the prophet.

God gives him a vision

Joshua the high priest is stood before God and Satan.

And in the vision

God promises to bring forth the Branch

The Messiah:

“For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua

Upon one stone shall be seven eyes;

Behold, I will engrave the graving thereof,

saith the Lord of hosts and I will remove the iniquity  
of that land in one day.

In that day, saith the Lord of hosts,

shall ye call every man his neighbor  
under the vine and the fig tree.”

The vision was interpreted to prophecy the coming of the Messiah  
and on that day God would forgive all iniquity  
and every man would be called to gather  
beneath the fig tree.

Jesus could only mean that Nate (Bartholomew) was one of those  
men

And Jesus had seen him there.

Nathaniel's reply says it all:

Thou art the Son of God  
Thou art the King of Israel.

Jesus' responded;

“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open  
And the angels of God ascending and descending  
Upon the Son of man.”

Certainly this was the calling of Bartholomew (Nathaniel)

As an Apostle.

And perhaps an explanation of the vision that Jacob  
Once had.

Of a ladder upon which were ascending and descending  
The angels of God: Jacob's ladder.

Jesus was the ladder in his vision

The bridge between Heaven and Earth.

And so Bartholomew lived the rest of his life as an Apostle of  
Jesus, the Christ.

Like many of the Apostles he took to heart the Great Commission

Which Jesus gave to them;

Go ye therefore and teach all nations

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost”.

Scripture does not record, but second century historians  
 Have documented that Bartholomew went east.  
 To a land described as India  
 Perhaps not the country we associate with that name  
 The term India was of an elastic nature  
 Descriptive of the area east of Babylon  
 Perhaps parts of what we now call Iraq and Iran  
 Southern Arab lands.

There is a 2<sup>nd</sup> century account of a teacher named Pantaenus of Alexandria

Who traveled to Arabian lands  
 And there was shown the Gospel of St Matthew  
 Written in Hebrew that they said was given them by  
 Bartholomew.  
 Evidence of his journey there.

There are also accounts of him traveling to Armenia  
 Then a large country in the Caucas Mountains  
 Stretching from the Black Sea, to the Caspian Sea  
 and south through what is now Eastern Turkey  
 and northern Iran.

And it is here that our story ends.

One of the risks the Apostles ran was that the introduction of Christianity would challenge and upset the existing order.  
 Old religions, especially pagan ones and polytheistic ones  
 Fought to prevent this new religion.  
 It occasionally turned violent.

In Armenia, there was a king named Astyages  
 Who reacted with violence to Bartholomew's work.  
 He had him captured

And in the most gruesome and horrible manner  
Skinned him alive and then beheaded him.

That all took place in the Armenian city of Albanopolis.  
Today 97% of the people of Armenia are Christian.

A staggering statistic  
for a country surrounded on three sides  
by nations in which Islam is the mandated state religion.

We remember Bartholomew this day for his dedication  
And tireless work for Christ.  
For taking the risk to travel to lands that he did not know  
Evangelizing people he did not know,  
Who spoke languages he did not know.  
And for the sacrifice of his life to God.

He is a shining example for us of a life well lived in Christ.



