

FIVE-DAY FORECAST

Table with 5 columns: TODAY, SUNDAY, MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY. Includes weather icons and temperature ranges.

ALMANAC

Table with 2 columns: Item (Temperature, Precipitation, Wind Chill) and Value (High/Low, 24 hours ending 8 a.m., etc.).

WIND CHILL

Table with 2 columns: Time (8 a.m., Noon, 4 p.m., 8 p.m.) and Wind Chill value.

UV INDEX



The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection. 0-2 Low; 3-5 Moderate; 6-7 High; 8-10 Very High; 11+ Extreme.

AIR QUALITY INDEX



0-50 Good; 51-100 Moderate; 101-150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200 Unhealthy; 201-300 Very Unhealthy; 301-500 Hazardous

HEATING DEGREE DAYS

Table with 2 columns: Time (Thursday, Month to date, Season to date) and Heating Degree Days value.

TIDES

Table with 3 columns: Time, High, Low. Includes locations AT SANDY HOOK and KEYPORT AT RARITAN BAY.

MARINE FORECAST

Today: Wind west-southwest at 6-12 knots. Seas 1-3 feet. Visibility clear. Wind southwest 4-8 knots. Seas 2 feet or less. Increasing clouds.

WEATHER HISTORY

New York City was hit by its biggest 24-hour snow-storm on Dec. 26 and 27, 1947. The accumulation was more than 26 inches in Central Park and 26 inches at Newark, N.J.

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SUN AND MOON

Table with 3 columns: Sun (Today, Sunday), Moon (Today, Sunday), and Moon phases (First, Full, Last, New) with dates.

THE STATE

Table with 3 columns: City, Today Hi/Lo/W, Sun. Hi/Lo/W. Lists various New Jersey cities and their weather.

Weather(W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.

LOTTERIES

Table with 2 columns: Lottery Name (FRIDAY, DEC. 26 NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA) and Details (Cash 5, Midday Daily, Evening Daily, etc.).

Series

Continued from Page A1

Symbolic writing

In considering the Gospel of John, Spong draws on his tenure as a member of The Jesus Seminar, a panel of Biblical scholars of all faiths formed in 1985 in Berkeley, California.

bread of life' or 'I am the resurrection.' If someone came up to you and said that, you'd wonder about their sanity.

"But the church's view was that they found in him that which satisfied the deepest hunger in the human life," the bishop added, "and so they put the words 'I am the bread of life' into his mouth as a way of interpreting that experience."

Similarly, many of the stories, and even characters, in the Gospel of John are literary creations conjured to interact in stories that illustrate points of spiritual truth, according to Spong.

The bishop also calls into question the story of

Lazarus being raised from the dead, told only in the Gospel of John and not in the other three.

"Lazarus is dead four days when Jesus calls him and he comes walking out of the grave in his grave clothes and nobody reports that for 70 years," Spong said.

Probably, he said, John was using the parable of Lazarus and Dives, which appears only in the Gospel of Luke.

"That parable concludes by saying that if they don't believe Moses and the prophets, they will not believe even if one is raised from the dead," Spong said. "So

John takes that and says it as if it's history."

Deep truth

Why the intense scrutiny of the Gospel of John? Certainly this inquiry, and others, have been the cause of some controversy in Christian circles.

Spong said his career has been about filling the gap between the sophisticated academic pursuit of Christian knowledge and the simplified Biblical teachings that most churchgoers are told.

"That's deliberately done, I think, to try to keep people from asking serious questions," he explained. "I'm convinced, though, that you have to go as deeply as you can into truth. I'm not concerned about whether the

See BIBLE, Page A4

Replace

Continued from Page A1

of an inexpensive, but treasured, family possession.

"It's a Christmas miracle," Elaine Romito said. "They only gave us their first names and said they lived nearby. The father's name was Alex and the son, who looked like a teenager, maybe 16, was named Brian. They asked if we were the family who lost our baby Jesus. When we said they were, they asked if they could replace it."

The seasonal act of

kindness came about a week after members of the St. Clare's Hospital New Jersey Self-Help Group Clearinghouse, where Elaine Romito has volunteered for more than six years, chipped in to buy them another replacement baby Jesus.

"That was so kind of them to do, but it was different than the original one," Elaine Romito said. But Alex said his son, after seeing reports of the theft, tracked down the exact model replacement on eBay and bought it.

"I looked online and if you buy the same set from the manufacturer now, the baby Jesus is dif-

ferent," Mark Romito said. "So he must have known enough to buy the old one."

"For a teenager to go to that kind of time and effort into it was very touching," Elaine Romito said.

"The father said the same thing happened to them a while back," Mark Romito said. "Their baby Jesus was stolen."

Alex and Brian even bound the replacement baby Jesus to the crib with fishing line to help thwart future thieves.

"We just couldn't believe it," Elaine Romito said. "We are very grateful. It made our Christmas."

News of the original theft at the Romito residence spread quickly, followed by a report a few days later by another Rockaway Township resident, George Falcone, who reported a similar baby Jesus theft from his front lawn in the White Meadow Lake section.

Rockaway borough police later contacted both the Romitos and Falcone after recovering a baby Jesus figure, which turned out to be Falcone's.

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Today in History

Today is Saturday, Dec. 27, the 361st day of 2014. There are four days left in the year.

On this date in:

1831: Naturalist Charles Darwin set out on a round-the-world voyage aboard the HMS Beagle.

1932: New York City's Radio City Music Hall first opened.

1945: 28 nations signed an agreement creating the World Bank.

1947: The original version of the puppet character Howdy Doody made its TV debut on NBC's "Puppet Playhouse."

1968: Apollo 8 and its three astronauts made a

safe, nighttime splash-down in the Pacific.

1979: Soviet forces seized control of Afghanistan.

1985: Palestinian guerrillas opened fire inside the Rome and Vienna airports; 19 victims were killed, plus four attackers who were slain by police and security personnel. American naturalist Dian Fossey, 53, who had studied gorillas in the wild in Rwanda, was found hacked to death.

2007: Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was assassinated during a suicide bomb attack in Pakistan following a campaign rally.

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Zoo

Continued from Page A1

gain compassion for — many different species, including lions and tigers and bears, exotic birds, monkeys, reptiles, deer and farm animals that make their home in a peaceful setting on seven acres in the country, off Lacey Road.

And now, it also serves as a penitentiary of sorts for Ocean County's most notorious four-legged outlaw — Rocky, the hybrid bobcat from Stafford, who on Dec. 19 was ordered by Stafford Municipal Judge Damian Murray to live out his life at the zoo after continually breaking out of his owner's home over the course of the year.

But, it's not so bad for the feline outlaw. You might say that Rocky is serving his life term at one of those "country-club prisons."

After his repeated escapades roaming Stafford upon managing to get out of an enclosure at owner Ginny Fine's home, Rocky, now estimated to be about 50 pounds, is actually living the American dream. He has his own house, which measures about 12-feet-by-7-feet, and an enclosed yard that is about 42-feet-by-20 feet, on the grounds of the zoo.

Rocky is content

The zoo's director, John Bergmann, says Rocky keeps to himself, but seems content in his surrounds in the park. One recent afternoon, the hybrid bobcat sat perched atop rafters in his yard and stared down at visitors who had come to see the notorious creature. Bergmann said Rocky has a steady diet of chicken, which is a delicacy for the animals at the zoo, who generally are fed beef.

"He can go wherever he wants — up, down, around or inside," Bergmann said of Rocky.

Rocky is not the zoo's only famous resident. Popcorn Park was home for 10 years to Princess, a 27-year-old camel who gained fame by successfully picking the winners of NFL games during her stay at the zoo. Princess was euthanized in January when the arthritis she suffered from rendered her unable to stand.

Like Princess, every animal at the zoo has its own story.

Pike the goat, Boo-Boo the bear

Take Pike the goat, for instance, who was given the name because he made his home for about a year on a New Jersey Turnpike overpass and was often seen running on the road, Bergmann said.

About two months ago, Pike was captured on Route 206 in Bordentown and brought to stay at the zoo, Bergmann said.

Then, there is Boo-Boo the black bear, who was serving as a roadside attraction in Iowa before her owner used her as a down payment on a car at a less-than-benevolent car dealership, Bergmann said. The dealership used the animal to bring in business before she was rescued by the zoo at age 2, some 17 years ago, he said.

The zoo is almost constantly getting calls about all kinds of animals in turmoil or in need of homes, Bergmann says.

The facility opened in 1977, after one of the Associated Humane Societies' directors took in a mistreated fawn on the grounds, and then the directors received a call about a raccoon that got a leg caught in a trap and wound up having to have the limb amputated, Bergmann said.

Not wanting to let the mutilated raccoon out in the wild, "we built a cage for it in front of the shelter, and that was the start of the Popcorn Park Zoo," Bergmann said.

"It wasn't meant to be a zoo," Bergmann said. "It was supposed to be a dog and cat placement facility — an adoption center."

But the rest is history. Upon entering the tranquil grounds, visitors

are greeted by crowing roosters and colorful peacocks that stroll around the park. They soon are treated to sights of horses, cows, goats, tigers, bears and lions.

Personal history

Bergmann is used to taking in animals that others don't want. He has been zoo director since the facility's inception, after first being hired by the Associated Humane Societies as an animal control officer.

"I always had an interest in animals and drove my mother crazy, bringing home stray dogs and stray cats," he said.

Now his son, Jonathan, shares his love for animals and is a veterinarian who cares for the creatures at Popcorn Park, the director said.

The zoo relies on donations and is open seven days a week, he said.

"We're always looking for help with donations," Bergmann said. "One tiger eats 15 pounds of meat a night at \$1 a pound."

"We take animals that no one else wants," Bergmann said. "We want people to walk out of here with more compassion than they walked in here with — that's our goal."

More information on the zoo and how to help can be found on the Associated Humane Societies' website: www.ahscares.org.

Corrections Policy

The Daily Record corrects factual errors as soon as they are brought to our attention. Errors should be reported to Executive Editor Joe Ungaro at 973-428-6624.