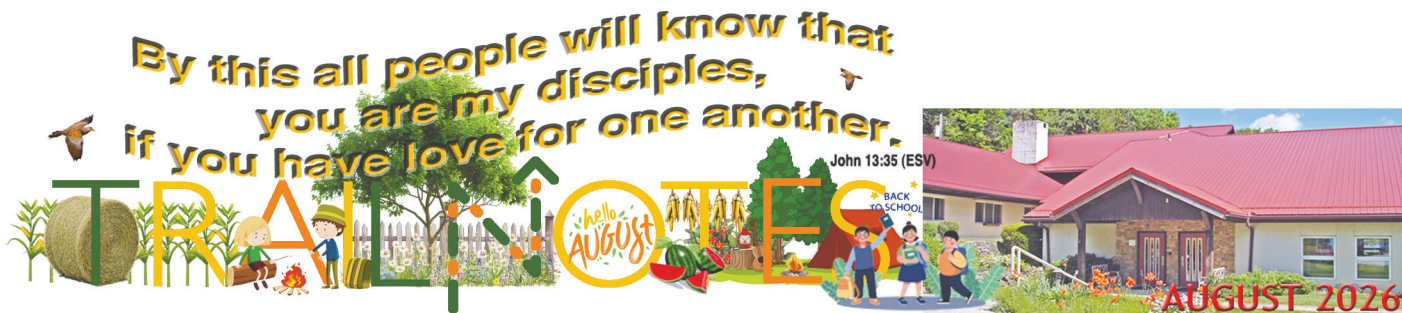




The Christian life is a journey.

TrailNotes speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the "landscape" we are passing through in this trail-laced, wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. **TrailNotes** is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we're learning and doing. This is a monthly publication of Grace Fellowship Church, Mansfield, Ohio.

What ever happened to Robert and Debbie Key? *Robert Key*

By now many of you will be wondering what happened to Robert and Debbie Key. We did go from being heavily involved, front-row, and conspicuous to often missing, over the course of the last few months. We shared with our Circle Church group what was going on, and so the grapevine was supplied with some truthful information. However, knowing how grapevines work, and people wonder whether they have heard the complete story, let me set your minds at ease and give you the full explanation.

Before I discuss what has happened, let me make absolutely clear what has NOT happened. We are NOT leaving the church because of an offense. We love you all. The relationships that are here at Grace Fellowship are one of the major factors making it difficult to proceed with what we are doing. The other thing to know about my above statement is that "We are NOT (actually) leaving the church..." This is why you continue to see us occasionally. The worship team also knows that we are here more than you might realize as we frequently come and worship with them during rehearsals. I also have continued to help with repairs around the building when appropriate.

So, what has happened? This all began rather unexpectedly at the end of March. In our participation in the March of Prayer gatherings each year, we have never even attempted to go to every service, but have typically chosen one each week to attend. We often deliberately chose a traditionally black church for at least one of them simply because we believe in unity in The Church and that we are all called to have a ministry of reconciliation. This particular March we attended one such church, Mt. Calvary Baptist. When we were there, we sensed the Lord drawing us to something there. It took us several more visits there and a couple of lengthy meetings with their pastor, Hans Lang, before we felt like we knew enough to say anything to anyone.

As it turns out, Mt. Calvary is just coming out of a

very nasty church split situation, much worse than any of the turmoil that we here at Grace Fellowship experienced in that time prior to Eric Byrom's coming. Hans is new on the scene and is being used by God to begin the rebuilding process. We sensed that the Holy Spirit has taken notice of their situation and is moving to restore. What we felt was that we were being called to somehow be a part of this restoration work.

When I sat down to discuss the situation with Eric, I was amazed to hear how he was able to confirm what we were sensing. The way I understood Eric, he has a vision for churches that are doing well to send people

(Continued on page 2)



Mt. Calvary Baptist Church Pastor Hans Lang with Debbie and Robert Key

What ever happened to Robert and Debbie Key? *(Continued from page 1)*

out to encourage churches that are struggling. Not with the idea of taking over and re-branding the smaller church to be like us, but rather to support them in their vision and ministry.

So, where are we in all this? Debbie and I are going out as missionaries, if you will, to support Mt. Calvary Baptist. As such, we covet your prayer support. We are, at this point, just feeling our way along the path to see how the Lord is doing this, so we cannot lay out before you a detailed plan. We do not yet know if this is going to be short term, long term, permanent, part-time, or full-time. We are waiting to see how the Lord leads. Currently, we are approaching this as part-time, intending to be in and out at Grace Fellowship. We also anticipate a relationship developing between our churches and will be facilitating that as we can. We will keep you informed as we have something to share. We are still discovering how our involvement will fit into their vision and ministry, so it is too early to be able to know how some of you might be able to support, as well. Don't be surprised, however, if we approach some of you from time to time requesting involvement in a particular event or ministry.

Update from Tamura City, Japan 日本・田村市からの更新情報

Wednesday, July 1, 2026 at 1:41 AM

2026年7月1日(水)午前1時41分

Hello, everyone,

みなさん、こんにちは、

This past month has been in full swing as we just hit the summer mid-term season. Since I am at an elementary school, this means we are in the midst of our longest stretch of school with no breaks. Our next three-day weekend is in July, which I think all the students and teachers could use, though the students still have plenty of energy for English lessons. With it being summer, the heat here rises, and so does the chance of a typhoon hitting. We have already been hit by a ton of rain, but we have been blessed not to be getting the worst of it. Both of my umbrellas have broken due to how often I use them!

As for me, I have spent many of my days after school prepping for climbing Mt. Fuji this July. I have been able to enjoy lots of long walks and hiking in the mountains in town with friends. During this time, I also had to start the visa renewal process. Please pray that this process is speedy, unlike the last time. Hopefully, I am in better shape this time around since I am

already here! I am so blessed to be here with a company that assists with the whole process.



The town of Funihiki, Japan, as seen from Mt. Katasone, on which the new church is built.

In regard to the church, the congregation is working through Acts. We still have the same number of attendees, but I have been able to invite a friend to worship at night services the team hosts once a month. This has opened up the door to many gospel-based conversations with my friend and co-workers. Please pray that God is using this time to place seeds into the hearts of people I work side-by-side with every day. (I have attached a few pictures from the past month. God has truly blessed Japan with such beauty!)

Thank you for all your prayers,

Maria

Maria M McCreadie

マリア・マクレディー



Sunset from Maria's apartment in Funehiki with the mountains rising behind. Yes, the sun also sets in "the land of the rising sun!"

Editor's note: Please, everyone, do pray for the people of Funehiki, the children being taught, and our English language teachers who are teaching them, as well as Shinji Okubo as he now leads the small Funehiki Evangelical Church.

Facing up to Mary *Peter E. Gillquist* (Continued from the July 2026 TrailNotes issue)

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND MARY

We know that the Old Testament is more than just an inspired account of the history of mankind or of Israel in particular. In its pages—indeed central to its message—is also the prophetic record concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. He is typified throughout. Moses is a type of Christ, in that he leads the people out of bondage into the land of promise. David typifies Christ as King of Israel. Adam is a type of Christ as head of the human race. Often overlooked, however, is the fact that the Virgin Mary is also seen in the prophetic pages of the Old Testament. Most Christians are aware that the Prophet Isaiah predicts Mary's virgin conception of Christ when he writes: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) But there are numerous other passages which speak of Mary as well.

EVER-VIRGIN

From the very early years of the Church, Mary was called not only Virgin, but Ever-Virgin. She was seen as never having had a sexual union with Joseph, before or after the birth of Christ. Ezekiel 44:1, 2 is a passage often referred to by the early Church Fathers in this regard. It states: "Then He brought me back to the outer gate of the sanctuary which faces toward the east, but it was shut. And the LORD said to me, 'This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter by it, because the LORD God of Israel has entered by it; therefore it shall be shut.'" In traditional interpretation of this passage, Mary is the temple, and Christ is the Prince of Peace. The gate mentioned is seen as a picture of Christ's passage through the door of Mary's womb. You might not find that interpretation in some of today's commentaries, but it was held by the great majority of early Church Fathers, as well as many of the Reformation leaders.

At this point, however, a very valid question can be raised. If she remained a virgin, why does the Gospel of Matthew tell us that Joseph knew not his wife until Christ was born (Matthew 1:25)? From a scriptural standpoint, the presence of the phrase, "until she had brought forth her firstborn Son" does not automatically mean that Joseph must have known her afterward. This is because in both Greek and Hebrew the word for until or to can have several different meanings. We find it in 2 Samuel 6:23: "Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to [until] the day of her death." It is

used again in Matthew 28:20 where the risen Christ says "Lo, I am with you always, even to [until] the end of the age." And in Deuteronomy 34:6 we read that Moses was buried "in a valley in the land of Moab . . . but no one knows his grave to [until] this day". Obviously the use of the word in these passages does not imply that Michal had a child after her death, that Christ will depart at the end of the age, or that Moses' burial place was discovered the day Deuteronomy 34:6 was written. By the same token, the word until in Matthew 1:25 does not mean that Joseph and Mary began a sexual union after Christ was born. Such a teaching is found nowhere in Scripture and is contrary to the consistent voice of the entire early Church.

But doesn't the Bible also mention other brothers and sisters of Christ? Who are they and where did they come from? For one thing, they are never directly called the sons and daughters of Mary and Joseph. In several passages the Bible speaks of the children or relatives as "brothers." Abraham and Lot are called brothers, although Lot was actually Abraham's nephew. And Jacob and Laban are called brothers, even though Jacob was the son of Rebecca, Laban's sister. Scripture is therefore silent concerning the nature of this relationship between Christ and these brothers and sisters. The early Church Fathers differed slightly in their understanding of what the terms meant. Some, such as Saint Ambrose, believed that they were children of a former marriage between Joseph and a wife who died prior to Matthew Chapter 1. Others taught that they were cousins. But on one point, almost everyone is in agreement: Mary and Joseph had no sexual union whatsoever, before or after the birth of Christ. I must say in all candor that had my betrothed been the woman chosen by the Father to bear His eternal Son in the flesh, my view of her would have been utterly transformed and my honor for her infinitely heightened. Imagine being betrothed to the Mother of God. It was so with Joseph. His betrothed was Ever-Virgin.

ROYALTY

If we as the Church are called to be "not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but . . . holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:27), does it not follow that she who is the progenitor of the Lord of that Church should be of that same holy character? Not only has Mary by the mercy and power of God conquered both sin and death, the psalmist sees a glimpse of her in heaven through prophetic eyes. For in Psalm 45, Christ is King, and Mary is at His side as Queen

(Continues on page 4)

Facing up to Mary *(Continued from page 3)*

and rightly so. If God can make us “kings and priests” (Revelation 1:6) for all eternity, certainly He has the prerogative to crown her with higher honor in heaven’s royal procession. Little did John and James realize, the day they argued about which of them might occupy the seat of honor at Christ’s right hand in the Kingdom, that God the Father had already reserved that space for the marvelous woman He chose to bear His Son for our salvation. The honor is appropriate for the most blessed of all women, the one who is our very icon or picture of holiness. Who else could be more rightly rewarded? Thus the psalmist is well within the mark when he writes of Christ, “At Your right hand stands the queen,...” (Psalm 45:9)!

OTHER TRADITIONS

There are two other beliefs concerning Mary that must be briefly mentioned and addressed. The first is her bodily assumption into heaven, the other her immaculate conception. It was widely reported in the early Church that shortly after her death, Mary’s body was taken up into heaven. In later centuries, the Roman Church ratified this belief as dogma, while the Eastern Church withheld such an official imprimatur. Most Christians agree that such a miracle is within the realm of firm biblical precedent, Enoch and Elijah being two examples. Further, there is no known record of any gravesite or relics of the Holy Virgin. The assumption of the Virgin is safely seen as a historic Christian tradition, though not recorded in the Scriptures. The Immaculate Conception of Mary is a doctrine unique to the modern Roman Church. In an effort to distance Mary (and protect Christ) from the stain of sin, the Immaculate Conception holds Mary was conceived and born without sin. The Orthodox Church firmly rejects this doctrine on the basis of both Scripture and tradition. Whatever other excesses may have cropped up in history, the Roman Church has never believed or officially taught that Mary was in any way coequal with the Trinity or was to be worshiped with the Trinity. Such allegations are sometimes set forth by critics of the Roman Church, but without basis in fact.

(To be continued next month)

Editor’s note: Permission granted and excerpted from Facing Up to Mary by +Fr. Peter Gilquist, from Ancient Faith Topical Series. Published by Ancient Faith Ministries (formerly Conciliar Press), 1987, second edition 1994. Full copies, as well as other publications by +Fr. Gilquist, are available at this site: store.

ancientfaith.com.



A number of us at GFC will fondly remember the author of this article, who we knew as just “Pete Gilquist” back in the 1960s and 70s before he joined the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1987.

AUGUST 2026

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- 2 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 7:13-20.
- 7-9 Family camping weekend.
- 9 Elder Jadaé Fox preaching on Matthew 7:21-23.
- 12 Worship Dance Workshop at GFC.
- 16 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 7:24-29.
- 20 Back-to-church Sunday
- 22 Festival of Hope evangelistic outreach sponsored by godsfield.org at the Mansfield Speedway.
- 23 Pastor Eric Byrom speaking on the new theme for the year ahead.
- 28 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 6:19-21.
- 30 Celebration Worship.

Coming Attractions in September:

- 12 GFC men are invited to a retreat hosted by the men of the Elyria church.
- 25-26 GFC hosts a women’s conference, “The Hovering of Hope.”

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor

(A complete list of church functionaries will return next month.)