

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.

ElderTalk

The Nativity Scene of the Apostle John

FRED LINGER

We rarely turn to John’s Gospel in the month of December. It contains no account of a young desperate couple in search of shelter, no angels gathered in praise, no shepherds or kings in wandering search, no star in the cosmic glory and perhaps most necessary to our celebration, there is no baby!

I find it interesting that the best friend of Jesus was inspired to present a different account of the Advent. In fact, he knowingly, perhaps even with intentional drama, projects upon the story the first words of the Torah: “*In the beginning...*”

At the time John penned this, it could only have been blasphemous to the Jew. Yet to the Church, it pointed directly to that which precedes the events of Bethlehem, precedes the prophets, and precedes even creation; that which is too far above the natural mind to conceive. It points to our divine

heritage as humans.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

-John 1:1

The Word of God, all that He ever has revealed and all that He ever will reveal, ever-present, not of Moses, not of prophets, not of scribes, not of man, but eternal.

Then, as if to say, “Behold!”...

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

-John 1:14

Astonishing! “*Can this be true?*” should be our first response, with amazement. Does this very Jesus, child of Mary, come to us as the Word of God in person? Jesus is God’s very explanation of Himself, the language of heaven on earth.

Jesus, “full of grace and truth,”

Grace: Reconciliation.

Truth: revelation.

We must have both grace and truth. Without one, we have a God revealed, but no hope of relationship. Without the other, we have a relationship, but no knowledge of by whom. Together, these ought to be the ornaments of our life in Him.

As G. Campbell Morgan, one of my favorite expositors, here suggests, we can now understand John’s Gospel to read,

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh, The Word was with God, and we have seen His glory. The Word was God, full of grace and truth.”

May Christ be found expressed in all the “*language*” of our ways this season and beyond, reconciling and revealing as we go.




The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. John 1:9

Artwork by John Bell copyright 1998-2012 (www.jrbell.com)



“Folk art” porch hanging from J. & D. Kurtz family archives (1970s)

DECEMBER 2017

- 2** Men's Breakfast at McDonald's, Hanley Rd.
8 a.m;
- 3** Advent begins! *"Expectation: Emmanuel shall come to thee."* Eric Byrom preaching.
- 10** Recommendations for Elders due.
"Preparation: There is room in my heart"
Eric Byrom preaching. 
- 11** Prospect School Christmas Party 3:45 p.m.
- 17** *"Glory - The Glory of the Lord shall be revealed."* Rick Widener preaching.
- 20** GFC Christmas Party, 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.
- 24** *"Light: The Light of the world is Jesus."*
Eric Byrom preaching. 
Christmas Eve service: 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.
- 31** All Worship Sunday

MID OHIO OPERA presents

A sing-along - *Messiah*

Dec. 29 at First Congregational Church
Millsboro Road at 7 pm

No tickets required - donations accepted
"Bring your own music or borrow ours"

For the 5th Day of Christmas!

Bob and Kati Gardner receive award (continued)
doctor told Kati she shouldn't have any more children because of physical issues. Adoption was the next logical step.

Bob said their goal was to give all their kids the tools to become young adults...

The judge told those gathered he does not give out the "Love Never Fails" award to just anyone. He has done so only five times since 2000. *"Bob and Kati make a big difference in little lives,"* Spon said. *"Who can put a value on that?"*

The Gardners received a standing ovation. Spon asked if anyone else wanted to speak. Danny, 13, one of the couple's adopted children, took the opportunity... *"I love my Mom and Dad,"* he said.

Bob and Kati Gardner receive
"Love Never Fails" award for work
with foster children

-MARK CAUDILL
Mansfield News Journal



Judge Ron Spon with Bob and Kati Gardner at honor ceremony

MANSFIELD - Bob and Kati Gardner thought they were going to a meeting of foster parents. *"What's this all about?"* Kati asked as she walked hesitatingly into the courtroom of Richland County Juvenile Court Judge Ron Spon on Wednesday afternoon.

The Gardners looked around and saw Spon, along with their three biological children, their five adopted children and numerous other family members. Spon had a surprise: he was giving them the "Love Never Fails" award for their work with foster children.

"We had to stretch our ethics to keep this a secret" the judge said...

Bob and Kati have been foster parents since 2002; They have taken 19 placements and have had many, many more children in their care temporarily. *"The juvenile court is filled with a lot of tragedy, a lot of heart-ache—but also a lot of hope,"* Spon said.

Above all else, the judge said, kids need a safe home, something he can always count on Bob and Kati to provide.

Bob and Kati's biological children are adults. David, the oldest of the three at 30, spoke at the reception. *"You know you're from a loving home when your friends call your parents Mom and Dad,"* David said.

David said when he was in college, some of his friends would stop by to see his parents without telling him they were back in town... *"The biggest testament to their unfailing love is the eight of us,"* David said of the kids. *"Mom and Dad's love is never withheld. It's just their natural state."*

Bob said he and Kati each come from familie,s of five. They got married in 1985. After their third child a
(concluded in the left column)

Stable Reflections

STEVE McKEE

Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.

- Hark the Herald Angels Sing
Charles Wesley

When God chose to come to earth, He didn't show up in the exquisite opulence of Herod's palace, like we might expect for an event so momentous. He came to a dirty dark stable. We all know that.

When God came to earth, He didn't even pick the middle-class route and show up in a simple, but clean and well-lit inn. He came to an offensive, smelly live-stock stall, a place you wouldn't want to spend ten minutes.

God will be coming today, in the next hour and in the next minute, as He always does every day. Where will He show up?

If we are honest, He will show up, once again, in the dark, smelly stable of our lives—and of our church. We work pretty hard to clean up our lives and our church to make them respectable. That is good, but God is going to show up where He is *needed most*..in our smelly stables:

- our stables of fear
- our stables of resentment of others
- our stables of pride
- our stables of unforgiveness

Thanks be to God that we don't have to pretend we have a nice clean inn of a life. He will make sure that our valleys are made high and our mountains are laid low, to prepare a way for the Lord. I find great comfort in that. "*God and sinners reconciled.*"



The Adoration of the Shepherds (1658) oil painting on wooden panel - in the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal (Museum of Fine Arts), Montreal, Quebec, Canada by Nicolaes Maes (1634-1693) a Dutch Baroque painter and student of Rembrandt whose influence can clearly be seen in this painting.

Circle Church Groups send Christmas gifts...

LORI BARKER

to Operation Christmas Child: 59 shoeboxes and Noisy Offering: \$130.03 for shipping and Gospel booklets.

to Child Evangelism Fellowship: Our largest Coins 4 Kids offering: \$374.49. In our county 600 children made salvation decisions.

from the Vegas Circle: to Sagares and Melissa Martins and their children, Ryan and Emily, in Brazil. xenam11@juno.com

from the Nethery Circle: to Drs. Tim and Huyen Bartholomew and daughters, Alex and Emma, medical missionaries to Honduras. lefortone@hotmail.com

from the Key Circle: to Jay and Heather Shifley, Nathanael and Abby, serving with Frontiers, ministering to Muslims. djb303@pmbx.net

from the Fox Circle or Missions Team: to Peter and Alison Noonan. They have a business teaching English in Iraq (Always refer to them as "the Noonans" in print.)

from the Fox Circle: to Randall and Paula York in Brazil. Randall serves the team in IT and AV work. They both minister in their church and have taken mission trips to the Amazon in Brazil and to Ghana. randall-paulayork@iamusa.org.

from the Linger Circle: to GlobalLead: Grace Malicdem in the Philippines, ministering to youth and adults. She can be found on Face book and Email: grace.malicdem@gmail.com

from the Godsil Circle: to the Japanese Teachers: Brandon Terpsma, Colin Dunn, David and Cristina Norcross (married last summer), John Brandt, Virginia Thorne, Endia Matthews, Caleb and Kelly Anderson, Garrett Kaufmann, Nicole Moore, and Rachel Denenberg.

Nathan Tucker who recruits and trains the team goes to Japan twice a year. Greetings also to the church, the Makis, Shinji Ohkubo.

Nathan's email: tuckernathaniel3@gmail.com

from the McKee Circle: to Mike and Becky Kuelkers and their two daughters in Mexico. They are disciplers and teachers. They are on Facebook, and the Roggios have their email.

*Thanks be to God
for His indescribable Gift!*

My Japanese Thanksgiving

NICOLE MOORE

I have lived through my first Thanksgiving in Japan! I really missed my family, of course. I have so many great memories of Thanksgiving at my grandmother's house: chatting with my relatives, my mom's perfectly sweet and flaky pecan pie, and of course my dad carving the huge, golden-brown turkey!

However, this year I was able to make some new memories. I'm really grateful for the friends that I have here, which makes transitioning to a new country so much easier. This year American Thanksgiving just so happened to fall on the exactly as Japan's Labor Thanksgiving Day, a national holiday. So we got the day off. This day is not really the same as our Thanksgiving, but we Americans decided to take advantage of our day off and create our own Thanksgiving celebration. We invited some of our Japanese friends, and all 20 of us crowded into our team leader's three room apartment.

It was an eclectic dinner, to say the least. No turkey, because they're not commonly sold here and our teeny-weensy ovens aren't very accommodating to roasting large birds. However, one of my teammates did bake a glazed ham that was quite tasty. We also bought Kentucky Fried Chicken from the local KFC joint. We did our best to replicate some American dishes with all the ingredients available to us: green bean and sweet potato casseroles, for example. Oh yes, Nathan Tucker was visiting and lovingly brought us cranberry sauce! Dessert was apple crisp, cookies, and buckeyes.

Just when we thought we were full, one of our Japanese guests decided to pull out her takoyaki maker. This is a baked batter in a ball shape with chunks of octopus in it. I'm not a huge fan myself, but after she and some of the other guests made the regular octopus balls, they ended up making the same dough balls with marshmallow and chocolate instead of octopus! Kind of like a Japanese s'more. It was delicious! I was Glad to be able to observe the making of it.



Takoyaki S'mores

My Thanksgiving was not quite like the one at home, but I was thankful for this new opportunity that God has given me, and for the many wonderful people that I've been able to get to know. Happy Thanksgiving all!

Welcome Jeremiah Lazarus Garza!

November 2 was a Big Day in the Garza household. Jeremiah was born at 2 p.m. He was 8 lbs. 8 oz. and 21 inches long. We are looking forward to seeing you in church, Jeremiah!



Congratulation Garza family and to grandparents, Tom and Dana Day.



Eric and Steve Phillips with Havasupai at the Grand Canyon



"Merry Christmas!" say Gwen and Chris Tracy.

Grace Fellowship Church

365 Straub Rd East • Mansfield Oh 44903
419-526-4699 • gracefellowship01@gmail.com

Tom Kelby Elder
Rick Widener Elder
Eric Byrom Elder
Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox Office

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