



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.

Facing up to Mary *Peter E. Gillquist*

Is it safe to say that no woman in history is more misunderstood by modern Christendom than the Virgin Mary? And is it also probable that in a discussion concerning Mary between two Christians, if their differences remain unresolved, most likely it will be due to differing interpretations of the biblical data? If I have heard him say it once, I have heard Billy Graham say it at least a half-dozen times over the years: “We evangelical Christians do not give Mary her proper due.” There is no doubt in my mind that he is correct. But his statement raises a crucial question about Mary. What is her proper due? Before we look to the Scriptures for some answers, let us acknowledge right up front a problem which makes our task much more difficult than it should be. The highly charged emotional atmosphere which surrounds this subject serves to blunt our objectivity in facing up to Mary. Therefore, those of us who were brought up to question or reject honor paid to Mary in Christian worship or art often have our minds made up in advance. That is why we have allowed our preconceptions to color our understanding, even of the scriptural passages concerning her. We have not let the facts speak for themselves. As we attempt to face up to Mary honestly and openly, let us turn first to the Bible, the source book of all true Christian doctrine. We will consider what the New Testament teaches about her, and then we will turn to the Old Testament. To understand how the biblical record has been applied through the years by Christians, we will look specifically at Church history to understand both how she has been properly honored and how excessive beliefs concerning her have crept into the picture. Lastly, we will look at how we must face up to her in light of the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

THE NEW TESTAMENT RECORD

What is it, then, that the New Testament clearly teaches concerning the Virgin Mary? The Gospel of Luke, the book of the beloved physician, gives us at least four crucial answers.

1. Mary is the greatest woman who ever lived.

Whereas our Lord Jesus Christ tells us there is no greater man to walk the earth than John the Baptist, both the Archangel Gabriel and the saintly Elizabeth confess to Mary, “Blessed are you among women” (Luke 1:28 and 42). She is the most blessed of women for several reasons, the greatest of which is that she conceived, carried, gave birth to, and nurtured the very Savior of our souls. The One who today occupies the heavenly throne of David, seated regally at the right hand of God the Father, entered the human race and became our Savior through her womb. She was sovereignly chosen by the Father to bear His only begotten Son. In that role, Mary is the first person in all history to receive and accept Christ as her Savior. You and I are called to enthrone the Lord in our hearts and lives—to follow her example in doing so. Early in Christian history she is called “the first of the redeemed.” I remember entering a church some years ago and seeing a painting or icon of Mary with open arms front and center on the wall (the apse) just behind the altar. My first impulse was to wonder why Christ alone was not featured at that particular place in the church, though He was shown in a large circle that was superimposed over Mary’s heart. When I asked why she was so prominently featured, the Christian scholar with me explained, “This is one of the greatest evangelistic icons in the entire Church. What you see is Christ living as Lord in Mary’s life, and her outstretched arms are an invitation to you and me to let Him live in our lives as He has in hers.” The power of that icon stays in my mind to this day. For she has set the pace for all of us to personally give our lives over fully to Jesus Christ. Mary is also blessed because she found favor in the sight of God. Gabriel’s words of encouragement to her were, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28). Then he comforted her by saying, “Do not be afraid, Mary, *for you have found favor with God*” (Luke 1:30, italics mine). What does one do to become one of God’s favorites, to be favored by Him? Remember Cornelius in Acts 10?

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Facing up to Mary *(Continued from page 1)*

He was the first Gentile to convert to Christ, “a devout man and one who . . . gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). Two verses later he is told in a vision, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.” The Lord took notice of his deeds of devotion and brought him salvation. In a similar way, Mary’s purity found favor with God, and she was chosen to bear His Son. You say, “Wait a minute! Are you suggesting human merit earns salvation?” Not at all! As commendable as it is for us to live in purity, a devout life never merits salvation, else why would Mary be called first of the redeemed, or why would Cornelius be baptized into Christ by the apostle Peter? Prayer and devotion, however, do gain God’s attention. When we seek Him with all our hearts, we do find Him! Do you want to be favored of God? Then give Him everything you have; give Him your very life. This is precisely what Mary did and why she is to be considered the greatest woman who ever lived.

2. Mary is our model for Christian service.

While God certainly knew Mary desired to please Him, He did not take her service for granted. The angel explained how she would bear Christ. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest [God the Father] will overshadow you; therefore, also, the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Now Mary had a decision to make. Was she willing? Hear her answer, for it is the doorway to the life of spiritual service for all of us. “Behold the maidservant of the Lord!” she said. “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Even if we are totally sincere about wanting to follow God, He will never conscript us apart from our consent! This is why He is called “the God of all grace” (1 Peter 5:10). We are to choose freely to obey Him and do His will. Some thirty years later, by the way, Mary again had opportunity to exalt her Lord. She was with Jesus at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The servants who were in charge of the celebration discovered they were out of wine. Mary had no doubt as to who could solve their problem. Referring to her Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, she advised them, “Whatever He says to you, do it” (John 2:5).

[To be continued next month – permission for use granted]

Ed’s. note: Peter Gillquist was one of the group of men, along with Ray Nethery and Gordon Walker, who left Campus Crusade back in the late 1960s to try to follow in the ways of the early church. This article first appeared as a pamphlet now published by the Ancient Faith Publishing. It is applicable to us all.

‘The veil is torn’ *Robin Barnes*

(As shared with Grace Fellowship Church during worship on April 5, 2026 - Easter Sunday)



Imagine standing before the Great Veil of the Temple. Pause there for a moment...and really see it. Sixty feet tall. Thirty feet wide. Thick as a man’s palm. Woven with beauty...weight...and mystery. For generations, it stood as a silent but unmistakable message: “Keep out.” No words written across it...and yet everyone understood. It declared a holy truth—God is perfect...utterly pure...completely set apart...and we, in our brokenness, could not simply walk into His presence.

This veil was not decoration. It was separation. A boundary between humanity...and the holiness of God. But the veil was more than a barrier. It was a picture. Every thread...every color...every detail...was telling a story. A portrait...of Jesus...waiting to be revealed.

Look closer. Woven into the fabric was blue—the color of heaven. It reminds us of the divine. Of what is beyond us...above us...unreachable on our own. And it points to Jesus...the Son of God...who did what no one expected—He stepped down from heaven...to reach us. Fully God...yet willing to come near.

There was also scarlet—deep red. The color of earth...and blood. The name Adam itself is rooted in red...the dust from which humanity was formed. And Jesus became the second Adam. Fully man. He didn’t remain distant. He entered into our humanity...into our suffering...into our story. And like the crushed insects used to produce that beautiful scarlet dye... He would be crushed...for us. Wounded for our transgressions. Pouring out His blood...so we could be made whole.

Then there was purple, the color of royalty. When blue and red meet, heaven and earth...God and man they form purple. And here we see Jesus clearly—the God-Man. Divine...and human. Servant...and King. The soldiers once mocked Him...dressing Him in purple...placing a crown upon His head in scorn. But they did not realize.... They were declaring the TRUTH. He is the King of all kings.... He is the Lord of all lords.

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A new school term begins— in Tamura City, Japan

新しい学年が始まる—日本の田村市で

Date: Friday, May 1, 2026 at 12:10 AM

2026年5月1日(金)午前12時10分

Hello Everyone,

こんにちは、みんな

Our spring break has passed, and with that, a new school year has begun. I was able to travel to Tokyo for my spring break. I had a lot of fun going to coffee shops, walking through some ancient gardens, and going to a baseball game at Tokyo Dome. Traveling was fun to explore around a new area, and it was a good change of pace from my day-to-day routine.



Tokyo Dome Baseball (Tokyo Giants v. Osaka Tigers)
東京ドーム野球(東京ジャイアンツ対大阪タイガース)

With the start of the school year being April 6, I have been quite busy. We welcomed a new team member, and she is doing well! I also moved to Funesho, an elementary school here in town. It is only about a two-minute walk from my apartment. The school is one of the biggest ones in our area with around 600 students spanning from first to sixth graders. I teach English with only one other Japanese teacher to the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth graders. So far, the students and staff have been very kind to welcome me.

As for my team, sickness is going around as we start the school year. Please pray for quick healing. We also have new roles to help support our team since it is a new school year. At this time, I will continue to work on the Team Bible Study as the team's Bible Study Coordinator. I will organize the schedule, lead (by default if the week's slot is not filled), and host (by default) if needed. During this time, please pray that these weekly meetings are fruitful for our team to grow in unity. Also, the majority of us remained at the same school, so please continue to pray for relationship

building and for those who moved for relationships to begin. This is the most efficient way for us to show the love of Christ and, hopefully, the gospel to those around us.

The church is doing well, and our new team member plays the guitar and sings wonderfully. She has been able to lead a few songs in English and Japanese during times of worship. While the sermon is still in Japanese, this is a good time for me to do my own study on the passage Pastor Okubo Sensei is preaching on. Please pray for Okubo Sensei as he continues to lead the church faithfully. I also attend a church in Iwaki periodically that has sermons in English. This is beneficial for my own walk with Christ. I love talking to the Pastor and his family! Recently, they have given me the opportunity to serve in this church this coming weekend. This weekend, they will have a kids' day camp. They asked me to come as support and lead a craft for the kids. So far, six kids have signed up, which is a lot for Japan, and some of their parents will also join. Please pray that the Holy Spirit will be working at this time in the kids' hearts so that they may come to truly know Christ.

Japan is a slow-moving country, but my team and I have been so blessed to see some of the growth Christ is doing here. Thank you for all your prayers, and please continue to pray as opportunities present themselves daily.

Maria M McCreddie

マリア・マククリーディー



The Waterfall cherry tree of Miharuru 滝桜 美晴



Sunset in Funehiki Town 船引町の夕日

'The veil is torn'

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And woven throughout it all...was white. Pure. Spotless. A reminder of holiness. It reflects the sinless life of Jesus—the only one worthy to stand in the full glory of God.

For generations...this veil stood. Unmoving. Unyielding. Uncrossable. A constant reminder: "This far...and no further."

But then...came the cross.

On that day, as Jesus hung there...bearing sin... carrying sorrow...fulfilling what every thread of that veil had been pointing toward...He cried out: "It is finished." Not "I am finished." But "It...is...finished." The work was complete. The price was paid. The sacrifice was enough. And in that very moment...something extraordinary happened.

The veil...was torn. In an instant. Not worn thin. Not gently parted. Not slowly unraveling over time. Torn. And not from the bottom—where human hands could reach...but from the top—where only God could act.

God Himself...tore it open. The barrier was removed. The separation...ended. The message of "Keep out"...was silenced forever. Because the final sacrifice...had been accepted. The Lamb of God...had made a way.

And what does that mean...for you?

It means...no more distance. You are no longer separated from God. You don't need rituals.... You don't need a yearly priest.... You don't need to prove yourself worthy. Jesus became the once-and-for-all offering.

It means no more striving. So many of us live like we still have to earn our way in...trying harder...doing more...carrying the weight ourselves.

But the truth is—the work is finished. The price has already been paid... in full.

And it means bold access. You are invited into the presence of God. Not with fear. Not with hesitation. But with confidence. Not because of who you are...but because of what Jesus has done.

The veil is no longer standing. The way...is open because of Jesus' sacrifice.

So step through. Not proudly...but humbly. Not fearfully...but boldly. Step into the presence of God... your Father...who is no longer separated from you—but has made a way...for you to come near.

JUNE 2026

	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

3, 10, 17, 24 Summer Game Club, at GFC, 9 AM-3 PM. (That's every Wednesday!)


6 Walk for Life, begins at North Lake Park, 10 AM.

Games Reach Game Night at Foursquare Gospel Church, 6:30-8:30 PM.

7 Elder Jadaé Fox preaching on Matthew 6:1-6.


11 Elders' Day Retreat.

12-13 American Heritage Girls use GFC facilities.

14 Elder Matt Godsil preaching on Matthew 6:7-15. 

21 **FATHERS' DAY**
Greg Frankenfield preaching on Matthew 6:16-18.

21-26 Youth for Christ Camp Week at GFC.

28 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Matthew 6:19-21. 

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Eric Byrom Presiding Elder/ Pastor

Jadaé Fox Elder

Matt Godsil Elder

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