

# Baptist pastor and wife fail to reunite with kidnapped children

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SAN JOSE, Calif. (ABP) — A Baptist pastor and his wife returned from California to their Georgia home after failing to reunite with their two children who vanished along with their maternal grandparents 20 years ago.

"I think they're kind of spooked," Mark Baskin, a high-school band teacher and bivocational pastor of Normantown Baptist Church in Vidalia, Ga., said in a Feb. 9 interview on NBC's *Today Show*. "How would you feel if you've suddenly realized the last 20 years of your life have been a lie?"

Baskin and his wife, Debbie, traveled to San Jose, Calif., in hopes of reconnecting with their now 28-year-old daughter and 27-year-old son allegedly kidnapped after the children, then 8 and 7, were left in custody of Debbie's parents in Tennessee while the Baskins enrolled at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., in 1988.

Marvin Maple is escorted by deputies to initial court appearance on kidnapping charges in Tennessee.

Christi and Bobby Baskin now go by the names of Jenny and Jonathan Bunting. They apparently are standing by their grandfather, Marvin Maple, alias John Bunting, who was arrested on kidnapping charges Feb. 2 thanks to anonymous tips after an article about the cold case appeared in the Jan. 12 issue of the [San Diego Tribune](#).

Maple, 72, waived extradition and made an initial court appearance Feb. 10 at Rutherford County General Sessions Court in Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Wearing shackles and an orange jail jump suit, Maple requested more time to prepare for a preliminary hearing, which is now rescheduled for March 17.

Mark Baskin said the couple knew going out to California the children might not want to see them, presuming that Maple and his wife, Sandra, now deceased, likely said horrible things about the parents during the two decades the family was broken apart.

The Maples won temporary custody of their grandchildren after claiming the Baskins abused Bobby during a visit. Police investigating the charge found no evidence of abuse and recommended the children be returned to their parents. Two weeks before a court order gave the Baskins custody, the Maples and children disappeared.

Since locating their children, the Baskins have gone on a media blitz attempting to tell them they still love them, don't blame them for what happened, and want them to reconnect with their family, including two younger brothers ages 25 and 16.

"It's been probably very hard for them. We realize that," Mark Baskin said. "We came here thinking that this very well could be the case, but we came anyway, because we want to see them, we want to reestablish our relationship with them. I think with time they'll realize they do need to reach out to us."

*Today's* Meredith Vieira asked Debbie Baskin how she survived two decades not knowing where her parents were or if her children were dead or alive.

"I survived because of Jesus Christ," Baskin said. "We've had so many people in America and across the world praying for us and just remembering us. When you have faith, you have hope, and we've hung on to that hope and the memories and lovely, lovely people. We've been very

blessed with just so much support all these years and people don't realize but a kind word can just make somebody's day and keep you going, and that's how we've done it."

Debbie Baskin, also a teacher, said she tried to talk to her father while in California, but he refused to see her.

"I wanted to tell him that I had forgiven him, but there are consequences to actions and he was going to have to deal with those consequences now," she said. "And I also wanted to tell him that he had tried to destroy me and our family, but we've not let this define our lives. We have two sons. We have adopted a son, and I wanted him to know that his plan did not totally work. And I wanted to see him. I hadn't seen him for 20 years."

*-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.*

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