

Sermon Title: **“The Beginning of Our Faith”**

Bible: **Matthew 2:1-12 & Mark 1:4-11**

When: on Epiphany & Baptism of the Lord Sunday, January 7, 2024

Where: about 20 people (plus YouTube streaming viewers) at Gilroy UMC

### **Opening Prayer**

O Lord, let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

### **1. Do You Remember Your Baptism?**

Happy New Year! I hope that all of us will have another blessed new year! We have twelve months. But how many days in this year? As it is a leap year, there are three hundred sixty-six days. Among them, I believe that there is a special day for you, which is your birthday. Do you remember your first birthday? I cannot remember my first birthday, but I will celebrate my birthday, because it is my special day. How about your baptism? Do you remember your baptism?

Because I was baptized as a baby, I cannot remember the very day of my baptism. But I still remember my confirmation day. At that time, I was grumpy. That's because I wanted to be baptized by my own choice and decision, not by my parents'. But now I cannot help but be thankful for my parents' care and love, because I am still a Christian. I am thankful for my parents' commitment to raise me in God's love and grace. I am also thankful for my church, especially for Sunday School teachers that I have met. They supported and guided me

throughout my faith journey. So, I still confess my faith in public as a Christian. Do you remember your baptism? What made you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and your Lord?

## **2. Epiphany & Baptism of the Lord**

Today's first scripture reading is about the visitation of the magi, wise men, or three kings to the baby Jesus. Many churches celebrate this event twelve days after Christmas. It falls on January 6th, which is called Epiphany. The word epiphany came from the Greek word *epiphania*, which means appearance or manifestation. Who appeared to whom? Did Jesus appear to the three kings? Or did the three kings appear to the baby Jesus? It can be understood either way, but my first preference is that Jesus appeared to the three kings. So, the epiphany can be understood as revelation. God became a human being. God reveals Godself to the three kings from the East, even to the Gentiles, outside of the circle of Judaism at that time. The reason why we remember and celebrate the three kings' day is this God, this Jesus Christ, reveals Godself and Jesus-self to us as our Savior and our Lord, even after two thousand years later, and even far away from Bethlehem. Yes, I confess Jesus Christ as our Savior and our Lord! How about you?

And the second scripture reading is from today's lectionary, which is the Baptism of the Lord Sunday. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. And then, Jesus started his own public ministry. I believe that Jesus was already a son of God even from when he was a baby, as we celebrate at Christmas. But somehow Jesus needed baptism. Why did Jesus need to be baptized? Originally, John's baptism was one of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Did

Jesus need a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? In my understanding, Jesus did not need this kind of baptism, but God wanted to reveal God's grace and love through the baptism. To the magi, God sent the star for them to follow. For Jesus, the heavens were torn apart and the Spirit came down like a dove. And there was a voice from the heavens! There was God's voice, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

I still cannot remember my first birthday, but I know that I was a son of my parents, and that I am officially recorded as a son of my parents. When I came to the United States, and when I followed the immigration process, I needed to submit many documents, and one of them was my birth certificate, which showed what date and where I was born and the names of my parents. What if there was no birth certificate? Then, will I not be a son of my parents? I am still a son of my parents, regardless of my birth certificate, right? And the birth certificate is to confirm it, right? Likewise, I believe that God wanted to confirm and proclaim that Jesus is the Lord through baptism.

### **3. The Beginning of Our Faith**

I believe that God created all of us in God's image. And I believe that we are all God's children. But there is a moment of eureka or aha for us to confess Jesus as our Savior and our Lord. When I was young, I was looking forward to my birthday, because I could receive many birthday gifts. But one day, I was thinking of my parents and my birthday together. I was thinking of my birth, not only because of many gifts and cards, but also because of the love and care from my parents. So, on one of my birthdays in the past, what I did was not to

wait for my birthday gifts, but to write a thank you card to my parents.

Do you remember your baptism? It is okay not to remember that exact moment. It is okay not to have any miraculous experiences, like having a star to guide you like the magi or hearing anything from the heavens like Jesus. But please remember God's grace and love through baptism. That's because God wanted to proclaim our adoption by grace! And God wanted to confirm God's love and grace in public with your response! If you were baptized as a baby, who was there? Your parents or Godparents? Which church was it? Have you been Godparents to someone? If your children were baptized as a baby, thank you so much for your commitment to raise them in God's love and grace. If you or your children are not baptized yet, no worries. We are already God's children. We are already loved ones. God already reveals Godself to you and me. But when you are ready to say yes in public toward God's love and grace or for your commitment to raise your children, please come to me.

Sometimes our faith journey is not easy. It is neither challenge free nor temptation free. The magi from the east met King Herod first before Jesus Christ. Jesus got through the forty days of temptation right after the baptism. We might not experience any miracles from some illnesses or suffering. We all must face the inevitability of death. What God promised is to be with us in our lives; in our ordinary lives and even in our suffering. We rely on God's revelation, God's grace, and God's presence, and it is the beginning of our faith.

I would like to close my message with a ritual of remembering our baptism. I am so thankful that God chose not the star or the voice from the heavens, but water as the means of

grace! God's love and grace does not change, so we do not rebaptize, but let's please remember our baptism!

## **REMEMBERING OUR BAPTISM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

Through the Sacrament of Baptism

we are initiated into Christ's holy Church.

We are incorporated into God's mighty acts of salvation

and given new birth through water and the Spirit.

All this is God's gift, offered to us without price.

Through the reaffirmation of our faith

we renew the covenant declared at our baptism,

acknowledge what God is doing for us,

and affirm our commitment to Christ's holy Church.

### **THANKSGIVING OVER THE WATER**

*The pastor may pour water for reaffirmation into the bowl at this time in such a way that the congregation can see and hear the water. The pastor may place hands over the water.*

Pour out your Holy Spirit,

and by this gift of water call to our remembrance

the grace declared to us in our baptism.

For you have washed away our sins,  
and you clothe us with righteousness throughout our lives,  
that dying and rising with Christ  
we may share in his final victory.

All praise to you, Eternal Father,  
through your Son Jesus Christ,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit  
lives and reigns forever. Amen.

### **REAFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

*Scooping up the water and letting it fall back into the bowl;*

Remember your baptism and be thankful. Amen.

### **THANKSGIVING**

Let us rejoice in the faithfulness of our covenant God. Amen.