

Today is the first Sunday after Epiphany. Epiphany is an “*Aha!*” moment when you suddenly feel that you understand something that is very important to you. during the season of Epiphany, we discover and celebrate the significance of Jesus Christ and what his mission is about. As we celebrate the baptism of Jesus on the first Sunday after Epiphany, we contemplate both Jesus’s baptism and our own.

What do you think about when you think about baptism? Do you think about your baptism or perhaps the recent baptism of a family member? For those of you baptized as infants, your memories may be a little vague. Although you may not remember your baptism, you are made alive by God’s Spirit and you are gaining life by God’s Son.

In the New Testament reading Jesus is being baptized. Before he has done anything, he hears the words from God, spoken for everyone around to hear, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” Before Jesus goes into the wilderness, before he heals the sick, comfort the lost and give sight to the blind, before he has done anything, Jesus is declared, “This is my Son, the beloved.” Jesus’ identity is shown as the Son of God in the baptism. With this identity Jesus begins his ministry.

I hope you also hear this good news today. Before we do anything, God declares that you are “my son and daughter, I find happiness in you.”

We are God’s children. This is our identity and the message that we celebrate this day in Epiphany. Through our baptism, we are united to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, who submitted to the will of God, even giving his life on the cross for our redemption. In baptism we commit ourselves to a life lived in response to this great love. Our journey in faith is to learn how to live a life in response to this love.

Also, we commit ourselves to teach our children and the next generation to live in response to this love.

Martin Luther, the German theologian, often proclaimed that as Christians, we should remember our baptism daily. Remembering our baptism assures us of the grace and presence of God in our lives. Remembering our baptism assures us that Christ identifies with us and walks with us on our life's journey.

William C. Placher illustrated Luther's point with an example from basketball. "In a team sport, the players who are always asking, 'how am I doing? Am I getting my share of the shots? Am I going to be the star in tomorrow's paper?' never play to their potential.

On the other hand, we have all seen the games where the players lost themselves in a team effort that involved a kind of self-forgetfulness that made them the best players that they had ever been. They tossed aside the part of themselves standing on the sidelines, and, in forgetfulness of self, became most fully themselves."

Thus, as we remember our baptism daily, we can submit to the will of God for our lives. This is not always comfortable or comforting. While baptism reminds us that there is nothing, nothing we need to do to earn God's love, it is offered to us freely and abundantly because we are God's heirs. The tough part is living out this baptismal truth. It is hard to remember who, and whose we are. We have been claimed as God's beloved. We can choose to remember, remember who we are and live out this truth in every moment, or we can forget, forget who and whose we are.

I encourage you to remember your baptism everyday in 2020. Remember your baptism-remember when God chose you; Remember your baptism-remember when you chose God; Remember your baptism- when the transforming power of

God was manifest in your life; Remember your baptism-when God declared you through Christ Jesus, "This is my son and my daughter. I am well-pleased with them and am sending them out with a mission in the world." Remember your baptism- how much God loves you.

Moreover, as we remember our baptism, we realize that we are given the incredible gift of being made children of God, and that there is no greater gift. Gratitude has to follow remembering our baptism.

When any person does something for us, we feel gratitude. However, most of us are not used to expressing gratitude to God for all the things He has given us, even though the ability to live in this feeling of gratitude is an important part of our spiritual journey. For Christians, expressing gratitude to God for all the various things is regard as a spiritual practice.

I want to do this spiritual practice together. I named this spiritual practice GRATITUDE 52. We did CHALLENGE 52 in 2019. We memorized 52 bible verses together. It was a spiritual practice to live our lives with God's word. In 2020 I want you to make 52 GRATITUDE LISTS. I will ask to complete the sentence, "I am grateful to God for _____"

God has given us all the various things in our lives including life itself. Everyday we wake up in the morning to live another day due to God's grace.

However, although we accept God as our Creator, we do not feel the need to express gratitude to God. we probably overlook God's thousand gifts big and little day to day. The result of a research shows us that people think that on an average 65% of events happen as per destiny and 35% happen as per their willful action. However, as we are a Christian and practice gratitude, we can experience God's

presence in our lives. We can experience that everything happening in our lives is happening as per God's purpose.

Gratitude isn't just an emotion that happens along, but a virtue we can cultivate.

Think of it as something you practice as you might exercise or yoga.

Notice all the good things you normally take for granted. Did you sleep well last night? Did someone at work or on the street treat you with courtesy? Have you caught a glimpse of the sky, with its sun and clouds, and had a moment of peace? It also involves acknowledging that difficult and painful moments are instructive and you can be grateful for them as well. Directing our attention this way blocks feelings of victimhood.

In one study, people randomly assigned to keep weekly gratitude journals exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives, and were more optimistic about the upcoming week compared to people assigned to record hassles or neutral events. In another, young adults who kept a daily gratitude journal reported higher alertness, enthusiasm, determination, attentiveness and energy compared to those who focused on hassles or compared themselves to others less fortunate.

I want us to begin this year by effortful expression of gratitude. Now I invite you to make the first Gratitude list. I am grateful to God for _____ in the last week.

Let us be thankful that we are now connected to one another through Christ, not friendships or community but through the life, death and resurrection of Christ; Be thankful-even when we forget the promises we make to God, God remembers God's promise to us; Be thankful-through baptism we have been given the greatest power of all, the power of the Holy Spirit; Be thankful-there is nothing we can do to have God break relationship with us. Remember our baptism and be grateful.