



December 2024

Dear Praying Friends,

It's always amazing to see the way God works, even behind the scenes where you can't see! Here's a story of the amazing way God reveals Himself to those around us, and then the joy we experience when we see that He's been working all along!

"IT'S A MIRACLE!"

I don't hear those words very often, but before the service one Sunday morning this November, Mari, one of our church members came up to me to tell me those very words. The thing is, I had no idea what she was talking about. Mari was one of the ladies who was baptized at Akigawa River last year. She has been steadily growing in her faith and has been witnessing and praying for her husband and young adult son to be saved as well. We've had several conversations over this last year about how it seemed that neither had any desire to come to Christ. I encouraged her and prayed with her, but neither seemed to show any interest in trusting Jesus.

Then, that Sunday morning, as our service was about to begin, Mari comes walking in, beaming from ear to ear, motioning in the back of the auditorium at none other than Masaru, her son who had come to church with her! "It's a miracle, Pastor Steve!" Boy, I thought, you aren't kidding! Masaru came to church! The service was about to start, so I ran back and said hi and welcomed him, and then began the service. The sermon was rather a difficult topic in John 16 about Jesus reminding His disciples that they would face suffering and persecution because they were followers of Jesus; and how the world would hate them because they hated Jesus. I remember thinking, "Lord, of all the Sundays, why did Masaru have to come on THIS one!?" But I was surprised to see Masaru sitting in the back of the auditorium fully focused and engaged with the sermon.

After the service, Mari came up and said, "Pastor Steve, you need to talk to Masaru." So I went back there wondering if there was some kind of difficult situation that Masaru was dealing with that caused him to want to come to church. As we began talking, Masaru started telling me about a conversation he had with one of his friends who was a Christian earlier that week. His friend was talking to him about Jesus, and something she had said to him clicked in Masaru's mind. "Pastor Steve, I realized right then that it wasn't enough to just know about Jesus. I had to trust Him myself. SO I DID!" I was blown away. That was the LAST thing I expected Masaru to say! After picking myself up from the floor, I spent the next half hour making sure he understood what it means to trust Christ, and sure enough, he did. Mari came up to us later and said, "See! It's a miracle!" I couldn't disagree.



Since that Sunday, Masaru has embedded himself into Jesus. Our conversations each Sunday have shown his desire to follow Christ. It's been fun to walk with him as he embarks on this new journey. Pray for his spiritual growth. And pray for him as he shares Jesus with his friends. He's already working on bringing several of his friends to our **Christmas event** this coming Sunday. And pray for his dad too. Pray that the Holy Spirit will one day open his eyes the same way He has for his wife and son.

Masaru is one of many in our church family who has come to know Christ, and is now working and praying to let others know the joy of meeting the Messiah! Pray with us that God continues to reveal Himself to those around us! Pray for the Christmas events, including ours, that will be held all around the world to introduce Jesus to those who have yet to meet Him!

Serving Him,
The Carters to Japan