

Joshua - Faith Testimony

Good evening, My name is Maureen Schaffner. My husband, John and I have been parishioners at Holy Rosary since 1993. We chose this parish because of its loving priests that shepherd this wonderful faith community. Tonight I would like to share how a difficult time brought me peace, love, and acceptance of God's Will.

Some of you if not all, have experienced a year of nonstop major events causing extreme joy, stress, anxiety, anger, sadness, and/or fear. That year for our family was 2014.

The year started when some uninvited guests moved into our attic and decided eat a hole in the pipe under our bathtub. Consequently, when the tub was emptied all the water spilled out through our light fixture below which soaked our ceiling and kitchen. Who would have guessed that this would be the least of the events to follow. This year would bring two car accidents within two months that totaled two cars of which the last car was brand new. The good news was that my husband survived both accidents without a scratch, however he would receive scratches on his arms and face when survived a 20 foot fall to the ground from a tree he was pruning. Praise God no broken bones!

Sadly, we lost our beloved daughter-in-law, Jen, who bravely battled Type 1 Diabetes.

The next two major events in our lives were the announcement of two more grandchildren to be born in the Fall. This news brought John and I such joy and anticipation. Scott (my oldest son) and his wife, Angela, were expecting their second child in September. To increase our joy, our youngest son, Paul was also expecting his first child with Kim in November. This was unbelievable because we had previously waited eight years for our first grandchild, Christian who is now three, and now two more babies were on the way! Praise the Lord!

In March, I was waiting to hear about Angie's blood test telling us the baby's sex. We all were hoping for a girl. Scott called to share the results. They were having another boy and the results indicated that the baby had Down Syndrome. I was stunned to silence; not knowing what to say or how to react. This wasn't even on my radar that something might be wrong with

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the baby. I'm not sure what we discussed after that, only that the call ended. I collapsed on the couch in shock wondering: "How could God let this happen to this wonderful couple, why them?"

At Scott's request, I called to share the news with John and Paul. Sharing this sad news made my heart grow even heavier. I thought how in the months to come will I feel joy for one son's family and bear the sadness for other? God please help me.

After the calls were completed, I began to pray begging God to let the tests be wrong. This cannot happen to Scott and Angie. Denial seems to be the first step I take whenever there is bad news. The bargaining with God would begin.

Later Scott called back indicating he found some inconsistency with the email language regarding the results. The doctor's office confirmed that there was typographical error in the email. For a moment I thought my prayers were answered; but that was not be. The results were not Down Syndrome Trisomy 21, but Edwards Syndrome Trisomy 18 which was much worse. Scott sounded so sad, but amazingly calm. Then I recall the deep breath he took before speaking again; his tone had completely changed. He was now speaking from his faith in God. He lovingly said, "The baby is a gift from God and it doesn't matter what any of the tests say. Even if God takes the baby before full term we will celebrate each day of his creation. Mom, I'm leaving this in God's hands. God's will be done." He ended the call by sharing that Angie and he were seeking spiritual guidance from their parish priest.

When I hung up the phone, no emotion could find me. All I could think about was what Scott said. He was at the acceptance stage already. Where was he finding this spiritual strength? Of course I knew the answer it came from his Faith in God, but where was my faith? Why didn't I feel as he did? I was filled with such sadness and despair. My faith was shaken.

I decided to learn more about Edwards Syndrome (ES) so off to the Internet I went to read as much as I could about the disease. I learned that ES is a chromosomal condition associated with abnormalities in many parts of the body. A rare disease occurring in only one of 5,000 births. Most

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babies born with this syndrome only live a short time (avg. 48 days). Only five to ten percent of children with this condition live past their first year, and of these children they usually have severe intellectual and physical disabilities. Then I viewed YouTube stories of babies born with ES. Viewing these videos shook me to my very core. Families celebrating each day of their baby's short life with birthday cakes and balloons. Most of these families seemed so full of joy in the midst of their great tragedy. It's just not fair: I can't handle this. Then I remembered, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13. I began to pray more intensely asking God for the much needed grace so I could be there for my family.

Signs of Scott and Angie's ultimate faith in God were demonstrated repeatedly in the next few months. First came their visit with the Genetic Counselor. The counselor recommended an amniocentesis test for an absolute diagnosis (the blood test was 99% accurate). If the amniocentesis confirmed the blood test results, he was recommending the termination of the pregnancy. Scott and Angie shared with the counselor that they were Catholic and would not terminate the pregnancy no matter what the diagnosis. They said the expression on counselor's face was that of shock and disbelief. The counselor shared that since their facility had opened eleven years ago no one or couple had chosen to keep a fetus with a chromosomal abnormality. Scott and Angie left deciding not to have the amniocentesis since it could only increase the risk of a miscarriage. Even a small risk was too high.

Shortly thereafter the OB/GYN confirmed she no longer could be Angie's doctor due to the "high risk" factor in the pregnancy. Angie didn't miss a beat, she had faith that she would find ProLife OB/GYN. Through the grace of God she found one who was not only ProLife but also a Catholic.

I also witnessed their strong faith on a visit to their home. I found the two of them to be at peace as if all was normal. It was truly amazing to see such composure in the midst of such a stressful time. They shared that a priest was coming shortly to bless their home and Angie's womb.

When the priest arrived, he blessed the house then brought us all together in a circle and placed his hands over Angie's womb. During his blessing, time seemed to move in slow motion. I felt a warmth enter in my soul. It

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was the power of prayer; the power of the Holy Spirit bringing us peace and God's Grace at the exact time it was most needed. That moment changed my spiritual life forever. I also learned later that Angie felt the same sensation at that very moment.

Prayer became a priority. I needed and wanted to pray with more focus and conviction. I wanted to draw nearer to God. As St. James said, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you [4:8]." I thought of The Blessed Virgin Mary, she understands a mothers' love and I would ask her intercede for me. It was then that I felt a strong desire to pray the Holy Rosary. Since I hadn't prayed the Rosary very often in the past, the first step was relearn the four mysteries. Through the help of Mother Angelica (EWTN) I began saying the Rosary every day for my family especially for the two unborn grandsons (Joshua and Erik). I prayed for both grandsons to be born healthy. I prayed for Joshua's survival and if he did have ES or if he would die, that I have the courage, trust, and strength to accept it "Father...not my will but yours be done." Luke 22:42.

Praying the Rosary every day I found the focus needed to understand where my priorities should be. No more bargaining with God, but full surrender to his will. I now had found the spiritual peace that Scott and Angie have.

John and I also sought prayers from friends, our Holy Rosary Small Faith Sharing Groups, other family members, and co-workers. I also found two saints and asked for their intercession; Saint Raymond Nannatus (patron saint for midwives, pregnant women, unborn children, women in labor and high risk pregnancies) and Saint Gerard Majella (patron saint of expectant mothers and motherhood).

Each month of Angie's pregnancy was a blessed landmark as 95% of ES pregnancies terminate before full term. Since Joshua's birth was to be a C-section, Scott and Angie picked September 17 as his birthday. With all the grandparents and their son Christian present, we awaited Joshua's birth. Scott would be with Angie throughout delivery. I waited with Angie's mom, Darlene, in the hallway right outside the operating room while John was playing with Christian in the waiting room. I looked down the hall and there

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was Angie's Dad, Ron, standing in the corner with head bowed in prayer. It didn't take long. I heard the medical staff cheering happily through the doors. There was a medical person dressed in ER scrubs right outside the delivery room saying, "You don't need me? You don't need me?" She turned and gave us a "thumb's up" sign. She then left, rolling a gurney down the hall and out of sight. I found out later she was there to rush Joshua to the ICU if needed. Scott burst out of the delivery room beaming, "Joshua is beautiful. He looks like Christian. He shows no signs of having ES!" Scott and I hurried down the hall to the waiting room to share the good news. We cried with joy and praised God. Joshua's doctor said his birth was a miracle.

Unfortunately, our joy was soon shaded by news that Joshua had complications. He had an infection, Jaundice, very low blood sugar (side effect caused by Angie's Gestational Diabetes) and wasn't nursing very well. The staff wanted to be sure his health issues were not related to ES. They were concerned he might have partial ES so they took blood tests. The next few days were very difficult for all of us. Our emotions rose and fell with updates on Joshua's condition. How could Joshua look so normal yet possibly still have ES?

Scott and Angie arranged to have Joshua Baptized while in the hospital due to his health concerns. We all agreed that Joshua needed more prayers. We sought prayers from everyone we knew and placed Joshua's name in the weekly Prayers of the Faithful at Holy Rosary Church. Through it all I kept my faith by continuously praying the Rosary and trusting in God's grace, love and mercy; I kept repeating: "Thy will be done."

In just a couple days, the tests results were back. Praise God! Joshua didn't have any trace of ES! We burst out with cheers, cried, hugged each other and gave thanks and praise to God.

Joshua needed to stay in the hospital for an additional week until the medical team was convinced that he was healthy enough to leave. He is now a healthy active 10 month old boy who crawls all over his house chasing his big brother.

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Was the blood test in error or was Joshua cured in the womb? We will never know. However, Joshua's mom, dad, brother, his grandparents, the doctor who brought him into the world, the hospital team, and all the people that prayed for him know that his life is a miracle from God. Had the outcome been different, I know my family and I would have the spiritual strength to accept God's Will.

This miracle has changed me forever. I am listening more attentively to God's Voice. Joshua, while in the womb of his mother, helped strengthen my faith as well as helped me embrace the Holy Rosary which I continue to pray each day.

John and I were further blessed on November 10 with the of birth of our third grandson, Erik, born perfectly healthy to his loving parents Paul and Kim. Praise God!