

Thank you, Pastor John, for inviting me to share some of my story with our church family.

I am excited about the privilege of sharing with you a bit of my spiritual journey tonight. And I love doing this on Christmas Eve when we remember that **Jesus comes after us and doesn't leave us alone!**

My journey began as a child. I was raised in a church tradition. I "had" to make my sacraments, but then I was "done". I did my expected duty, but like so many people I just got on with life without any real reference to God. With no firm foundation, as the teen years came, peer pressure mounted, and I became convinced there was no God. And do you know what that meant? It meant I could do and behave as I wished. **But Jesus wouldn't leave me there.**

As my teen years were ending, I felt a pull to return to church. I met with a priest, and began attending church again. At about the same time, my brother was studying with the Jehovah's Witnesses. It was he that directed me to the Bible. I was stunned as I read the pages, and I wanted to learn more! After reading the Bible, I decided I could not continue attending my old church, but I didn't know where to go. So I "just tried to be spiritual on my own!" **But Jesus would not leave me there.**

In my late twenties I felt I needed to find a "new" church. At that time I began dating a person, who would eventually become my husband, Mark, and asked him if he would join me on a spiritual journey. We found a church home in a mainline Protestant church in Massapequa. We made new friends, we got married there our children got baptized there. But I have to be honest. Our spiritual life there was such a struggle. We had a pastor who really wasn't interested in Jesus or the Bible. She was only interested in "progressive ideals" and her brand of "liberal ideology." This might sound strange to you, but I left Sunday Services and church meetings angry, frustrated, tense and spiritually empty. It was a chore to go to church on Sundays. The final straw was when the Pastor gave me a book to read which spoke about the "resurrection myth" developed by the "Christ cults". It was awful.

So we started looking for a Presbyterian Church that believes the Bible is the word of God and wants to help people grow in their faith.

I scoured the Internet and, guess what? The North Shore Community Church in Oyster Bay popped up. I thought, too bad, that's so far away, I can't go there, I'm from the South Shore! Yet I looked at the website, and listened to a few sermons on my iPod. It happened to be the seven deadly sins series in the summer of 2010. I liked what I heard. Here is a Pastor, preaching from the Bible! Telling me what the Bible has to say about how I should live my life! It was amazing!

And so The last week in September of 2011 our family came to be with you on a Sunday morning at NSCC. Boy, was it different. There was lively music, and people were not just singing about the Lord. They were singing to the Lord. They actually believed God was here with his people. And he is. I can feel it! I left that first Sunday, feeling renewed. Here they are believers! Here they want you to believe. They want to educate you and your children.

As Pastor John says, we're not just learning how to be a Christian, but a Christ Follower. He likes to say "it's not just 'informational' -- it's 'transformational.'" And it's true! Now we can't wait to worship with

you on Sundays. We are part of the Young Families with Children Group. I loved the Christianity Explored study. Mark and I really enjoyed the Greenhouse Study with Pastor John and the Women's Conference with Nina in September. And then our family went on the church retreat in September. And all these things grew our relationship with Jesus Christ like never before. I have to tell you: it has been a transformational year in our lives. And our wonderful children have made new friends and they like church so much better now. Mark and I are amazed at the Sunday school teachers who love and pray for our boys.

I'll never forget the day we joined this church and Pastor John gave me a bible verse which was so fitting for my situation. Please let me read it to you: Psalm 30: 11-12, "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will praise you forever.

Jesus has renewed my spirit here at NSCC. I am no longer in "mourning", no longer angry when I leave church. Instead of assaulting my beliefs I am learning how to live out what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. I leave here each week so encouraged that I can change.

If I could be bold with you, can I simply say to you: "You cannot do it on your own. You need a community of believers to encourage you, challenge you, and support you. I am so thankful Jesus would not leave me where I was. He kept leading me until we found a home that would help us learn what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ.

Mark and I love you all and are so happy to be part of this family.

I would like to close with this scripture reading which I have asked to be put up on the screen:

"We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. Titus 3:3a - 7.