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WELCOME – Bobby & Hannah Schuller

BS: Wow. This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Good evening, welcome.

HS: Merry Christmas! Through Jesus, there will never be a hopeless situation. Hope and salvation have been born unto us. Thank you so much for joining us tonight.

BS: We're so glad you're here, and let me say congratulations for getting your reservation. They went out fast! So you nailed it. Believe it or not, this is a full house. This is the maximum amount of people we're allowed to have here, so you made it and we're keeping everybody spaced apart. We're so glad you're with us this evening, and my hope is that all of us; tonight, you will see, there is something about Christmas music, this year more than ever, that seems to be like a balm for the soul, like just healing. And my hope is that tonight the music that we're going to engage with wouldn't just be listening to beautiful music, but it'll really feel like worship for you. I really want to encourage you to listen to the lyrics of the music, to close your eyes at times, to allow the songs themselves to carry you and carry you away, even. And allow yourself to have your mind totally fixed on the Lord and watch what that does to bring a sense of peace at the end of a very difficult and tumultuous, chaotic year that so many of us have experienced, so I want to pray that that would happen..

HS: Amen.

BS: ..today. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father we love you so much and we thank you, God, for everybody that is joining both here in the house and in the courtyard and on television and on the internet, wherever they are, I pray, God, that tonight a good work would happen in our lives. We are putting you at the front of our minds, at the front of our lives, and asking, Lord, that you Jesus would be exalted. We love you so much, and it's in your name we pray, amen.

HAVEN: Amen. Turn to the person next to you and say Merry Christmas!

SCRIPTURE – Matthew 1:1-2,7-12 – Hannah Schuller

Matthew 2:1: After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him." After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and they worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

SCRIPTURE – Luke 2:8-20 – Hannah Schuller

Luke 2:8: And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

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Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told to them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Amen.

WELCOME – Bobby Schuller

We're so grateful that you're here, wherever you and whether you're watching online or on television, or you're here in the sanctuary or out on the courtyard, we're so grateful to be gathered together in this way.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

Would you stand with me? Hold your hands out like this as a way of receiving from the Lord, and we're going to say this together: I'm not what I do. I'm not what I have. I'm not what people say about me. I am the beloved of God. Its who I am. No one can take it from me. I don't have to worry, I don't have to hurry, I can trust my friend Jesus and share His love with the world. Amen!

DEVOTION – Bobby Schuller "Christmas Hope"

I believe most of us, hopefully all of us, experienced worship just now. That in this time when we gathered and we experienced this music, that something in us transcended our current situation. That even though maybe when you came to church you were stressed about a bill or a medical thing or a family member or maybe you got in an argument with someone recently, or some of these things. When we worship, something happens where we almost get a break from those things. Worship is one of the most human things you can do. We all worship. We all worship something, we all worship lots of things. The word "worship" literally means "worth ship." You ascribe worth to something. And when you have something that you ascribe worth to in such a way that we would call it worship, that's when you feel most alive. Worship is when you give worth to something so much that it is elevated in such a high level in your life that you personally begin to change the way you dress and talk and think and act, what you're interested in. It begins to revolve around this thing that you worth ship. So people worship all sorts of stuff and it changes them all the time. We talked a lot about music already. I can think of lots of musical artists that I really love, some of them are members of our little church guild here. And a lot musicians have CD's and a big following, and people would say I love their music or I love their lyrics. So you've got fans, and then you've got like this super fan. You know what I'm talking about? Where it's like everything in that person's life begins to revolve around this musician. So take for example a hip-hop artist that you're really into, all of a sudden the way you dress and the way you talk and what you're interested in and design, even things like fonts begin to change in the way that you think. Or maybe you like some kind of a jazz musician that you're really into, that you follow, like you really worship in a way this person. You wouldn't say it that way, but all you think about is this person. You begin to wear more sweaters and drink martinis or something, I don't know. But you know, you could see how there's a difference between loving a musician and like worshipping a musician or an actress or superstar. In sports, worship happens all the time. I love sports, I think sports is a healthy and good thing and lots of people rooting for the Lakers and it was a good season for the Dodgers, too, won the world series. So all sorts of fans were there cheering, but it's amazing when you go to a sports event, if you go like take for example soccer, especially in places like Europe and Latin America, a soccer game in those places, or shall we say football, it's called football everywhere else, anyway. Soccer games in those places don't even just look like a worship service, they look like a Pentecostal worship service where everybody's drunk. I mean it's crazy. And those games will start riots and people build their whole lives around it, and at work they're thinking about it, and everything they do they think about it. They begin to change the way they dress. And they're ascribing worship to a star or to a team. I remember one.. and again, Lakers are great, but I remember once there was a kid in our choir, he was like 28, and Anthony, I don't know if you remember him, wonderful guy, and he spontaneously had a brain aneurysm, and died.

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And it was a big shock and I went to his funeral, did the funeral, and one thing that I didn't say anything of course, it's not a big deal really, but some of his friends who were big Lakers fans draped a Laker flag over his casket. And this is what happens. You get excited about things. And things in their lives begin to change. They change what they read, they change who they hang out with, and it can split up families and do all this type of thing. But if anything does it more than I've seen other than faith, it's when someone falls in love. It's always a girl. I'm looking at my girl here. I remember in college, you'd have friends who would be some of the toughest, roughest guys, worst language, tough as a coffin nail, the guy that you want in a street fight, and then one day they meet some girl and all of a sudden they're all dressed up nice, and they're brushing their teeth all of a sudden and taking showers. Their language cleans up and they start being nice to everybody, and they also disappear. They never can hang out anymore and they're always out of money. And that's what happens, and you're like oh he met a girl. He met a girl. Or she met a guy, or whatever. And very often in life, you value and worship this person you're dating so much that you change, you change. You get what I'm saying. My point is this that worship changes us, and so often Christians want to will their way, try hard their way into goodness. I'm going to sin less, and do more good, and very often we are actually wandering away from the gospel when we do that. We can. No doubt about it, you are called to do good, to love what is good and hate what is evil, but at the core of it, is this heart of worship that you just love the Lord. And like that kid who falls in love, it just naturally happens to you. Things begin to change in your life in a positive way. And my message to you is that I know this has been a nutty year for so many people. And this has probably been a tough year for your kids or your spouse or your family. You're not always going to be there for them when they're going through a hard time. You're not always going to have people there for you when you're going through a hard time. And it is so important that we teach people and that we ourselves practice this idea of worship; of looking to the Lord when things are rough. When we cling to the cross in the middle of a storm, it doesn't make everything better, it doesn't make everything go away, but it gives us like oxygen to breath. It gives us a moment to recenter what's really important, and to remember He got us through before, He's going to get you through again. That's a promise. Okay, now during Christmas, we all have these things we do like leading up to Christmas. So for example I think a couple days ago, I still forgot, what's the name of the light thing? (HANNAH – night of lights) Yes, we went to night of lights at the Orange County Fair and drove around with our kids and one of Hannah's friends. Maybe you took a time to wrap some gifts or decorated the tree with some friends or your family. And during those times, I think we can all agree the most important thing is the playlist. Right? You've got to get the music right. Everybody knows. You got to get the music right. Right? Right, orchestra? Yes, okay. You're never safe in my church. My perfect music playlist is like a 50/50 split. I want to have on one hand this like what we were doing, like Hark the Herald Angels Sing, and O Holy Night, but then I also need you to weave in Santa Baby and Baby its Cold Outside. I need it to go back and forth. Like if it's too much of one and not the other, it's not good. And I'm starting to notice, because I love like Pandora or Apple Radio or some of these things, that it's starting to be like.. you get this choice between like Thomas Tallis style, all boys choir singing Christmas carols for hours, which is nice for one or two songs, but then you're just like I need Rock Around the Christmas Tree, or something. Or, the other playlist is just all.. what's another.. I've run out of fun Christmas songs. Baby its Cold Outside? I've already said that one. Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer? I guess so. Yes, Rudolph, yes, that's a good one. Well see that's the other thing. All I want for Christmas is you? You'll also notice that not only are they all not religious songs, but Mariah Carey is every other one. It's like Mariah Carey, then this guy, then Mariah Carey, okay anyway. You get it. And my point in all of that is that its feeling like there's this split, and I like both. And it's funny because as a fan of history, in no way a historian at all, but I like history a lot, when you think of Santa or St. Nicholas, St. Nicholas loved the Lord. Loved the Lord and loves the Lord. He is called saint because his life reflected the gospel in such a profound way that some counselor, some pope said you're a saint. You're a saint. And it's interesting because he is and was one of the most powerful people to ever live. St. Nicholas has also a very long name, very, very long name that was given to him by his peers, and it is such a profound and awesome title that I do not have in my nasally tenor the ability to say it the way it's supposed to be said. So I asked my friend Dr. Alvarez to do it. Ernie, you know what Santa's real name is, don't you?

ERNIE: His name is St. Nicholas of Byzantium defender of Orthodoxy, wonder worker, holy hierarch, bishop of Myra.

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BS: And believe it or not, that is the fourth time today Ernie has done that. Thank you, Ernie, I appreciate you being a sport. That is actually Santa's legit name. That is his real name. That is a killer name. That sounds like a name of a sword in a fantasy novel or something. That is great. St. Nicholas was born in 270 in what's modern day Turkey, Ionia. And he was born in 270 which makes him 1,750 years old. Pretty solid. It was a good life. St. Nicholas was born to wealthy parents, and I believe from an early age was a committed disciple of Jesus Christ. His parents passed away early in life, and they left him this big fortune. Now remember in those days, they didn't have the safety nets that we have today. If you run out of money, you die. You starve, you beg, you do whatever you can to not die. And so to give up his money in this way was a huge sacrifice, and that's what he did. So when he was young, he saw all of the suffering around him, and he just decided because of his love for Jesus Christ, he was going to give the money away. Just give it to people in need. Isn't that wonderful? There's lots of stories where he does this, and he even risks his life to save people, but one of my favorites is a story of three young women who wanted to be married. Now in the 3rd century, you could only be married if your father could pay a dowry to a groom. So a dowry is money that he would pay in order for you to take his daughter off his hands, which is in and of itself unjust, but anyway, they don't have the money to pay a dowry, which means they can't be married. And if they can't be married, that means that they will have to live and even work on the street as they get into their old age. And St. Nicholas, when he found out about this, because of his love for Christ and his love for people began to secretly give money to these girls. And the way that he would do it, some say that he put a little pouch of gold over the windowsill, or the other is in the middle of the night, he would reach through the windowsill and drop gold coins in the wet socks they were hanging by the fireplace to dry them overnight. That's how we got the custom, by the way. Isn't that interesting? And the reason he did it at night in secret is because as a student of Jesus Christ, he remembered what the Lord taught us to give to people simply because you love them and simply because they're in need. To not do it for your own glory to show off to everybody, but to not allow the left hand to know what the right hand is doing. Is that the way we always do it? No, but to him, he took everything so seriously and his relationship to Christ so seriously that this is how he did it. He was persecuted during the Diocletian persecution, which was one of the worst ones, and during that time, he was imprisoned and tortured because he refused to deny the name of Jesus. And one of my favorite stories, actually, was when during the council of Nicaea, which is one of the most important councils in Christianity, there was a heretic named Arius and in the middle of Arius' speech, Santa Claus walked across the room and slapped Arius in the face, and was arrested by Constantine and thrown into prison and temporarily defrocked. And while he was sitting in his prison, someone visited him and said why are you here? And with tears in his eyes he looked up and he said because of my love for Christ! Good line, isn't it? It's fun to think of Santa Claus slapping heretics, for some reason. At any rate, my point is simply this – when you think of Santa, think of Christ because that is who St. Nicholas really is. He's called a saint because he committed and commits his life to the Lord, and I think that's important. How he made his way from Ionian Greece to the North Pole and ended up with reindeer and all of those things, I wasn't able to find it in the original sources, but if any of you are historians know, please let me know on my way out, therefore I can fix it later. But anyway, all of this to say that during the Christmas season, there are lot of things that are really wonderful; there's some bad things, but there's some really good things, too. I've noticed this year, my experience has been that people during 2020 have been a lot meaner to each other, but for some reason during the Christmas season, it's like people have been really nice. I don't know if you've experienced something different, but I'm noticing that there is a kindness and a softness that's starting to come to people. My basic belief is that all of this good that comes, even in our society, its coming from Christ. It is coming from the Lord. When we lift up Christ in our lives, we lift up everything He stands for. We lift up loving our enemies and serving the poor and caring for people and forgiving each other and having grace for one another, being merciful and slow to anger, and being kind to each other. And this is at the heart of the gospel. If we want these things in our society, we have to worship the One that makes us like that, not by trying harder, but by simply loving Him and worshipping Him, as Santa did and does. So can I just say we don't worship Christians, because Christians mess up all the time. And we don't worship pastors, and we certainly don't worship churches, we worship the Lord, and if we do that, things will go better. Can I say that Christ is worth worshipping. The Son of God who laid His life down for you and for me to show us that the last will be first and the first will be last; that God loves everyone, even your enemies. God even loves your boss.

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God loves your neighbor that leaves trash in your yard and the other neighbor that takes his dog and poops on your lawn. All those people; the guy that cuts you off and flipped you off at the same time. God loves these people and He saved us when we were alone and He still saves us, every day. I'll finish with just this simple thought: continue to remember we just need the Lord. We need Jesus. And when we have the name of the Lord to cling onto, it gives us air to breathe in a time when it feels like we're suffocating. All this to say when we stop overthinking everything, and worrying about everything and hurrying all the time, we decide just to think upon Christ and to worship Him above all else, above all those other things that are good things: girls or boys or sports teams or the Lakers or Dodgers or music or whatever it is, but Christ is at the top, everything else becomes blessed and life in a way doesn't get easy, but it gets easier and we receive a balm and we receive some healing from the Lord in those moments. I want to say first, if you've not made a decision in your life to be a disciple of Jesus, make that decision today. Stop waiting. When I became a Christian, I didn't go down to an altar call, I didn't even pray a prayer. I really just kind of made a decision in my mind. I want to encourage you today to just do that. To just make a decision to not ride the fence anymore, to not be ho hum, to commit your life to the Lord. And the second thing I would say is more than ever, this is a time to find a church community. If you live locally, become a part of our church. Find a church, the people that are going to root for you, people that are going to show you what it means to live a godly kind of Christian life, a life after Christ in a time of chaos and tumult and a community that loves you just as you are, I think that's super important. We love you! And we hope that this is going to be one of the best Christmas' ever and I really appreciate you sitting through 18 minutes of me droning on about Santa Claus. But at the end of the day, our family and His calling and His purpose in our life, that's the most important thing. And so we'll look to that, amen?

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING – Christ Candle – Schuller Family

BS: I'd like to invite my family up, my kids and my wife. We are going to light the final candle. So guys, come on up. Hi Cohen! Come on up, man. Are you Cohen and Haven and Hannah.

HAVEN: The four candles we have lit signify hope, peace, joy and love. Four promises continually offers to us and all of them are made manifest in this one we light tonight, the Christ candle.

HANNAH: The prophet Isaiah spoke, for to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government shall be upon His shoulder. His name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace. In Christ we find the hope of transformation, the peace that flows from salvation, the joy of authentic Christian community, and the love that encompasses us in all our diversity, empowering each of us to make our own unique contribution to God's kingdom. In Christ we find light and dignity and the courage to be like Him, answering His call and following in His footsteps.

BS: Amen. Cohen, you want to say something?

COHEN: Pirates of the Caribbean. Pirates of Caribbean.

BS: Say in Jesus' name,

COHEN: Amen.

BS: Amen. Okay.

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

BS: Thank you all for being here! And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift His countenance upon you and give you peace in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and have a very Merry Christmas.