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GOOD MORNING – Bobby & Hannah

BS: This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Hello.

HS: Merry Christmas season, visitors and church family. It is really fun to celebrate with you. You know if God is willing to save anyone who believes on Him with active faith, then He is willing to heal anyone who believes on Him with active faith. It is for you. You are loved.

BS: Yes, we're glad that you're here today and in the calendar for advent, today is a joy Sunday, so we're going to talk about joy, but let's just practice that today, just enjoying each other's company and smiles. Many of us are going through tough times, but I almost.. this feels like a line from "What About Bob" or something, but I like almost want to give you a prescription or permission to be happy today; to just enjoy God's presence and take a break from your worries. Let's do that today and just enjoy each other's company, and especially enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much for your life and goodness. Thank you that you've saved us from our sins, that you've renewed our relationship with you; that you've restored us and placed us into a good and faithful covenant with you. And we pray, God that today we would be confident in those promises that you've given us in your word. Help us today to stand in your presence. Stand with us, Jesus, we ask, and it's in your strong name we pray, amen.

HS: Amen.

HAVEN: Turn to the person next to you and say God loves you and so do I.

SCRIPTURE – Matthew 2:10-11 - Hannah

In preparation for the message, Matthew 2:10-11: 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 worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Christian life is a joyful life. Hallelujah.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING (JOY) – Victor & MacKenna Akioyame

VA: During the first two weeks of the Advent season, we lit the candles of hope and peace. Today we light the candle of Joy. It is the only pink candle because it reminds us of the joy Mary felt as the angel Gabriel described for her how a special child would be born to her; One who would save and deliver His people.

It also reminds us of the great joy that was experienced by the shepherds and sung about by the choir of angels in the fields outside Jerusalem that holy night. As we light this candle, we welcome Christ's light of joy into every place of care and sorrow. Our joy builds with the anticipation of His birth and as we yearn to experience His love and presence in our lives.

MW: And now let us join together in prayer: we joyfully praise you, O Lord, for the promised fulfillment of your gift of salvation through the birth of your Son, Jesus Christ. As we wait, let us open to your glory and your gracious and loving presence. In the name of Jesus, your Son and our Lord we pray. Amen.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

BS: Whoever you are, would you stand with us? Hold your hands like this as a way of receiving from the Lord, and we're going to say this creed together as we do every Sunday: 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.

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MESSAGE – Bobby Schuller "The Joy of God"

Today we're going to talk about the scripture that Hannah read on the Magi, and I want to compare really two lives, two powerful kingly lives, the lives of the Magi; sometimes we refer to them as the three kings, and the life of Herod the great, or I should say the so-called great. Before we get there, I remarked to Hannah a couple weeks ago, I was like I feel like this year we really need Christmas. I didn't mean "we" like the Schuller family, I meant "we" like the world. I don't even want to say Americans. I know the whole world feels like this need for Christmas. And it was a weird thing to sort of say as I thought about my own words and I thought a lot about how so much of us have just felt down, for years, for many reasons, but there's been very often a sort of a grey sky emotionally for many people. And how the Christmas spirit as you see in so many Netflix movies or whatever, has a way of hypothetically breaking those clouds; making us feel happier, or more awake, or more excited, or to refocus on the things that really matter. Many of us, we have Christmas day memories from when we were a kid, and we remember them being some of the happiest moments of our childhood life, or even adult lives. You might have a few. I know for me; I remember just that amazing feeling of driving home. I was so lucky to grow up in.. my parents were divorced, but both families really got into Christmas a lot, and so no matter where I was, it was awesome. I sometimes wondered if my parents competed against each other to make Christmas better, which I was the winner in that scenario. I remember at night on Christmas Eve, going home from the Christmas Eve candlelight service and singing all this music and being so excited about the next day coming. I remember sometimes at my dad's house I would see actual soot footprints on the carpet going from the fireplace to the Christmas tree. And wondering what's in the stockings and opening the presents and all the food was always cinnamon rolls. My mom would make fresh cinnamon rolls from scratch. They were called Pillsbury and it was amazing, and they were always so good. I still remember growing up in LA, too, there was one Christmas it was 90-degrees outside, and my mom who's thoroughly Irish just was so disappointed by that so she covered the windows with foil and put on rain music and pumped the air conditioning down to 61 or something so it would feel cold, and we got all cozy. You have these memories, 'oh in 1986,' and now here's some history for you. Japan released the Nintendo entertainment system and I was an original patron of that great moment. Duck Hunt and Mario and there was.. I think that was it. It was Duck Hunt and Mario. Anyway, what an amazing feeling it was to open that present. Maybe you remember when you were a kid and you were like Ralphie from the Christmas story opening up the BB gun or whatever it is. You had your heart set on this thing; that feeling you had when you opened a present. I think very often, when we get around Christmas as full-grown adults, we still have this child inside of us that remembers those great moments with our family of a cool gift, or a cool Christmas experience and the magic of it all. I feel like when Christmas comes around, at least for me, and I think many of us feel this way, there's a desire as an adult to recapture that feeling in some way, especially if you have children, you want your kids to have that feeling, too, and you want to recapture it yourself. The reason I start with this today is it's a Sunday of joy, the pink candle on the advent wreath. When we think about joy, think about this is the thing that all of us really want. What a simple question to ask a person. What do you want? What do you really want in life? When you wake up in the morning and you think about what you want on the surface, what do you really want from that thing or event or emotion, what do you want? What is it that we really crave and desire. And maybe another way that the world might say it is we want to be happy. We want a feeling of happiness. Here's one way to think about it, if you've got kids, and not all of us do, but imagine you've got kids. I'm always surprised how often we don't take the advice that we give to our children. We only give our children the best advice because we want them to have a good life, and yet we ourselves, very often, don't want to follow that same advice. What do you want for your kids? What do you want from your son or your daughter. If you could choose for them to be either really wealthy or really happy, which one would you pick? If I could say of your child, would you want them to be really successful in the terms of the world's standards: achievements and glory, or would you want them to be happy, which one would you want? Maybe 80% of us would say happy on that one. We are in Irvine, after all. You never know. If you want your child to be famous, or would you want them to be happy? You see the reason is, there's this thing inside of us, the thing we really want for our kids is for our kids to have the good life. The good life. A happy life. And yes, we definitely want them to be moral, and we want them to live a life that mattered and ideally we want them to have a life that made an impact, but really at the heart of it, we want a happy life for our kids. And for those of us who are in touch, maybe, with what we want, at the heart of it is this desire to be happy.

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And so good question, what makes a person happy then, or what is a good life? And that is philosophically one of the fundamental questions that every single civilization, religion, everybody asks. Jesus answers it, by the way. We don't translate it as happy, but the word "Makarios" at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount and the beginning of Psalms 1 is "happy are the poor in the spirit. Happy are the meek," etc. That there is a promise of a goodness of life, a richness of life for those who live in the kingdom of God, for those who live under the loving care of Jesus Christ. And this is still a question that people think they've answered! And you can tell by the decisions they make. SNL, which has gotten less funny over time, but still has some really good skits from time to time, did one a couple years ago with Adam Sandler called Romano Tours. It is the all-time greatest, funniest skit of all time. It's just great. And I said all time twice, forgive me. Its Adam Sandler and he's doing commercial for trips to Italy, and he's saying 'come to Italy and go on a hike and see the French Riviera or the Italian Riviera,' rather. 'Eat some pasta. Visit the Coliseum.' And it's just this classic commercial, right? In the middle he goes, 'now a disclaimer – many of you sometimes have left bad comments because you came to Italy and you weren't happy. So let me say this: if you're sad at home, you'll probably still be sad when you come to Italy. Here's what we can do and cannot do. We can take you on a hike, we cannot make you a person who likes hiking. We can take you for some wine tasting. We can't change the reason you drink so much.' And he's going on and on. It's this amazing joke. 'We can take you to the Italian Riviera. We cannot change the way you feel in a bathing suit.' And he goes on and on. 'If you're not happy at home, you will probably not be happy just because you're in Italy.' And it's a funny thing. I'm not Adam Sandler, okay, I'm not Adam Sandler, but it's funny. And the reason it's so funny is I think many of us, we have these.. and we don't really think about it, it's just like a feeling, but we have these ideas, like if I just went somewhere, or if I just got this thing, or if I just found love, or if I just had kids, or if I just got married, or if my business would just succeed, or even my ministry would take off. Very often we associate.. or the inverse of that. If only I didn't have this spouse I would be happy. If only I didn't have this stupid job, I'd be happy. If only I wasn't sick, I'd be happy. There are some valid reasons when those things happen or don't happen that you feel happy or unhappy. But we forget that the rule of the human soul in general is that.. Dostoyevsky said it the best: a human being is someone who could get used to anything. That no matter how bad or how good life gets, there's this part of us that always sort of goes back to an emotional normal for us. The real question is how do we move that normal? Is there a way that a person can be really happy even if they don't have any of the things the world says makes them happy. If the answer to that question were yes, wouldn't it be worth all the money in the world? All the effort and time to get ahold of it? To teach it to your children? To pass it on to your friends and family? My friend, the answer is yes. That there is a.. maybe I can use this word, a sustainable joy that can be had by people. If I gave a random person a limitless credit card and said go to Vegas and do whatever you want, at first they would be pretty happy. They would be happy; they would be doing whatever what they want. But given enough time, if you said you could be there forever, you can do whatever you want for as long as you want, I don't know how long it would take, but eventually you would find one of the most miserable people on earth. Is there anybody here that disagrees with that? Maybe. In a year, two years, would we find a happy man or woman? I don't think so. That there's something that we can have, even if we're sick, even if we're poor, even if we've been betrayed, maybe Paul would say even if you have been tortured in prison, that you can be a joyful person, and what is that thing? It's the Holy Spirit. It's the spiritual life. It's a life that understands that there's so much more behind the carnal veil of this world that governs us, loves us, cares for us, watches over us and holds us deep, and it is the Lord and His kingdom. And we're in it now. It's in this room. It's in the air around us. It's the water we swim in. When we feel tired and exhausted, sometimes we're like fish that refuse to breath in some water, just holding his mouth closed. Suck it up! Suck up the air! Breathe in the Lord and let Him know that He's here for you. I've got to get back on track, Hannah. Here we go. Got to talk about Herod. I want to introduce you to an ancient way of viewing joy in the right way. I want to begin with Herod, one of my favorite historic characters located in the Bible, but even outside of the Bible is an important character. Herod the great or Herod the first, the great builder, architect person. Herod was a Roman fanatic. Loved Rome, loved Roman ideas. Was born to Antipater, the Idumaeen so was not born Jewish, and converted to Judaism and became the client king to Rome as the so-called king of the Jews. Now this was really important to Herod. Through politicking and friendships, he was great friends with Marc Antony. Unfortunately, it was rivals with Cleopatra. Isn't this an amazing time in history? It's amazing how many historic things happen around the birth of Christ.

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But anyway, Herod is a competitor and rival with Cleopatra, who's the queen of Egypt to the south, a Ptolemaic Dynasty and so she has a lot of glory and clout and Egypt is considered this like rich.. we might call it in America, old money kind of state with lots of culture and it's just this place that the Romans really think is cool, and Egypt really always wants to control the king's road in Israel. So there's this competitive thing where Herod, who is also a client state and very pro Roman is competing with Caesar over for favor and glory, and then is also worried about Cleopatra invading. He builds this network of amazing palace fortresses in a time when this wasn't very common. If you go to Europe in the medieval age, you see a lot of this kind of thing: fortress castles that are also palaces, but for Herod it's not completely original, but it's very clever that they're fortresses that can withhold a siege, but they could last like ten years and it still has a swimming pool, and has like ten years' worth of veal and wine. He builds some amazing things and gets a lot of validation from it. Many of us know that he's the one who really expanded the temple, and made it into the great temple. He expanded it to the north and did all this marble and many different amazing building projects, but the three you'll see today in Israel that are incredible. The first is famously Masada, which is near the Dead Sea. This would have been the first big impregnable fortress that Egypt would have faced coming north into the Levant. You can't really see much here. I should have picked a better picture, but this is what it looks like today. But you can kind of see if you go down the front here, there was like a fortress with three palace levels going here and almost impossible to take. Of course, the Romans did it, took them years. He built Caesarea Maritima: Ameritime. Named it after Caesar. This is Herod's palace. Here that's his swimming.. can you tell it's a swimming pool on the top left there? I think Herod liked swimming. I don't know, he might have been a fun guy to hang out with. Probably not. But anyway, gorgeous palace. You could see that today. And then also, and the most important one for this story, the Herodium which is Herod's main place he lived three miles from Bethlehem on a tel. So just look around, I mean, how far is three miles in the distance? Probably that mountain in the distance is more like ten miles, right? And so Bethlehem in those days was three miles from this place where Herod lived most of the time. And what you would find anywhere you went to these great things you would find Herod and his family crest. Herod – king of the Jews. This was really important to Herod because Herod wasn't a Jew! How do you become king of the Jews if you're not even Jewish? Well he converted, and he married a Maccabean princess. Maccabees were the actual kings of the Jews where the Hanukkah story comes from for like I forget it was a 150-years or something. But as a Jew convert, was ruthless, immoral to the bone, paranoid, always seeking more glory and fame. When the San Hedren was talking about his moral decisions, he had a lot of them wiped out, cleaned out and replaced. When he placed in an unkosher way a giant golden eagle, which is a symbol of Rome, on top of the temple and a bunch of Jewish disciples protested, he had them all executed. He killed multiple family members. His brother-in-law, who was becoming a famous rabbi and teacher and many people are, suspiciously drowned in one of the swimming pools, that was only like three feet deep. So everybody's like 'he drowned.' His wife, beautiful, amazing wife that the people loved, princess Miriam was accused falsely of adultery, and so he just strangled her to death. And then two of his sons, he heard rumors that they were plotting to upend his kingship, so he had them both executed, and then later when he found out it was his other son that created the rumor, he had that son executed. So no, he wouldn't have been a good guy to swim with. I was wrong about that, actually. Especially if you have a six pack, because he'd be jealous and he'd have you strangled. Herod really is just not a good guy, and what I see when I see Herod, and we're supposed to do this with Biblical characters, whether they're villains or heroes is we're supposed to see ourselves in them. I'm supposed to ask how is Herod a magnified version of Bobby Schuller? When do I become like Herod? And what is it you think that Herod really wants, and why does he want it? The second character in the story is the famous Magi. Not three kings, by the way. I think you all know; you've been going to church here long enough to know there were no three kings. There were three gifts, which kind of traditionally builds into this idea that there were three kings, but it could have been a hundred guys, could have been three guys. They all traditionally have names, but none of that stuff's in the Bible. It's all just tradition. And maybe it's true, I don't know. But what we do know is that the Magi obviously came from the east, could have traveled as far as 2,000 miles, I always think they're Jewish, actually. They're Jewish from Babylonia, and they're leftovers from Daniel's era when they are returning back to Israel, but they might not have been, they could have been Zoroastrians, they could have been some other religion or something.

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But the way they would have been experienced in those days would have been representatives from the great empire to the east, and they would have been looked at as like mad scientists, actually. They were thought of as wizards, they would read the stars. They did have an odd mixture between magic Harry Potter-type weird stuff and real science. So they had like this bizarre mixture of both. When they would come to a place like Israel just enshrouded in mystery, they would have been seen as educated educators, and just holders of mysteries and histories and all that type of thing. When they would travel, it wouldn't have been three guys, it would have been like Aladdin coming into Agrabah. A menagerie of animals and wealth and people and some soldiers. They follow this star, whatever that means, into the great city of Jerusalem, and so imagine that. It's just after Hanukkah, and there's still probably a lot of people; or actually we don't know if it was after Hanukkah, right, because this happens years after Jesus was born. They come in, and Jerusalem; remember there's no TV back then, there's no internet, there's no electricity, most people before 1930 were bored most of the time. Just ask my grandpa. On that note, when I told my grandma.. my grandma Schuller used to joke about living on a farm and how people would say it was great. She was like it was horrible. Living on a farm is horrible. It's just constant work and it's so boring. So go into that world and Aladdin comes into Agrabah. It's a big deal. And they come in, and everybody is like what is going on? Who are these people, these weird clothes and funny animals and magi and scientists. And they ask this question. You remember the question they ask? "Where is the king of the Jews who has been born this day?" Who's the king of the Jews? I mean it says it everywhere. It says it on the temple, it says it on the Herodium, Masada, who's the king of the Jews? Herod. Herod's the king of the Jews, and this giant, amazing, attention soaking parade of mad scientists asks where's the king of the Jews who's been born this day? And they're like did Herod have a kid? Ask Herod. Imagine that. So Herod, who's already paranoid about someone trying to take his crown, and somebody trying to illegitimize his rule, these people come in. Who do they think they are? And so he gets in this weird way, right? He invites them, probably in the Herodian, and they go up, they're three miles from Bethlehem now, and he says "when you find the king of the Jews, tell me so that I may worship him also." Might as well like (HISSES) tell me (HISSES) I well (HISSES); it's like you could hear it, and they're like okay, great. So obviously they're warned and they know. I just want to say this that when they found Jesus in Bethlehem, which would have been a village of like 300/400 people, very small, one-horse town, kind of like those little towns that have a blinking yellow light when you go through. Can you imagine the party they had? The celebration? They're bringing gold and frankincense and myrrh, which is just like incredible wealth, but more than that, there would have been food and celebrating and joy. Do you know who wasn't there? The fake king of the Jews – Herod. He was up in his Herodium, he could probably see the party happening from three miles away. He could see the lights, maybe he could even hear it; probably not, but he wasn't there. He was cloistered up, an isolated shell of a man, in old age, living a paranoid calcified life, keeping people out, trying to control every outcome, joyless. From Rome's eyes, a great achievement. He was given the moniker 'the great.' What else could you want that in death people called you Herod the great, like Alexander or Peter. It was one of the greatest nicknames you could get as a historic figure. There's nothing great about him, not in the kingdom of God. He was the least of these in the kingdom of God. No joy, no kindness, no place in the kingdom, except to show what not to do. There's sort of two lives that we look at. One's a successful life, and one is not. One's a joyful life, and one is not. One is a glorified life, one is not. One is a good life, and one is not. And the one that is, is the Magi. The ones who seek Christ, who will do anything to find Him and worship Him. Who will travel thousands of miles and it's a message to us that if we really want joy, it's not going to come from a Nintendo entertainment system, unfortunately. I mean it will for a little bit, but eventually you're going to need a super Nintendo, and then a Nintendo 64 and so on we go. There's never enough of those things, but one of the promises that scripture offers us is that if we reject our Herod-ness. See I'm like Herod when I become paranoid. I am Herod when I try to control all the outcomes in my life. I am Herod when I take the crown off of Christ' head and put it on my own head. I am Herod when I try to control people. I am Herod when I'm jealous, I'm Herod when I'm competitive but smiling on the outside. I'm Herod when I go to bed offended and angry all the time, thinking about everybody that did me wrong and hurt me. Thinking about all the ways that I've been treated unfairly and unjustly, I become Herod. When I become violent in my heart, angry, wrathful, bitter, I become the Magi when I let it go, man. When I just let it go. And I take the crown off of my head and I say I'm not a king, I'm just a Magi. There's no three kings. We take the crown off our head, and we put it before the Lord, and we say Lord, I trust my life and death to you. I trust my children to you. I trust my bank account to you.

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I trust my church, my school, my country, I trust my decisions to you. I'm going to love my enemies. I'm going to take it slow. I'm going to study your word. I'm going to seek the spiritual life. I'm going to seek spiritual rewards. Those are the kind of rewards that do not have diminished returns. They stay forever. They nourish us. They cause us to endure and to live the kind of life that's worth living. You don't need any of those things, and they're great if you have them, they're adorning. They're wonderful bonuses. They're great. But if you don't have the main thing, it's like having ornaments without having a Christmas tree. If you don't have the main thing, you don't have anything at all. Father, we ask you in Jesus' name to lead us into your kingdom as faithful disciples. Help us know, God, that the way you taught us to live is the best way. Thank you that we are forgiven and made into a new creation. Thank you for the cross and the resurrection. Thank you for the ascension, for the Holy Spirit. Thank you that you live in us now. Thank you that you're here now. We believe and we entrust our lives to you, and we thank you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, all God's people said, amen. Would you stand with us?

BENEDICTION – Bobby Schuller

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 His peace, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.