

Hour of Power Deutschland
Steinerne Furt 78
86167 Augsburg

Telefon: 08 21 / 420 96 96
Telefax: 08 21 / 420 96 97

E-Mail: info@hourofpower.de
www.hourofpower.de

Baden-Württembergische Bank
BLZ: 600 501 01
Konto: 28 94 829

IBAN:
DE43600501010002894829

BIC:
SOLADEST600

Büro Schweiz:

Hour of Power Schweiz
Seestr. 8
8594 Güttingen
Tel.: 071 690 07 81
info@hourofpower-schweiz.ch
www.hourofpower-schweiz.ch

Spendenkonto:

PostFinance AG, 3030 Bern
Konto: 61-18359-6
IBAN:
CH1609000000610183596

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WORDS OF WELCOME – Bobby & Hannah

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

HS: Merry Christmas, friends. You know the Bible says that she will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God is with us. Wow! Thank you, thank you for being here, and celebrating Christmas Eve with us. We love you.

BS: We're so excited that you came. Tonight's going to be really awesome musically, too, and some people have asked can you take pictures or shoot videos. Its totally fine if anytime in the service you want to pull your cell phone out and shoot a video. Just make sure to tag me on your Instagram.. just kidding. And I actually heard.. Marc, it took me until the fourth time to hear it, but Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.. Marc loves to put Easter eggs in the orchestra pieces, and I for sure heard Pirates of the Caribbean. So listen for yo ho, yo ho, a pirate's life for me in Hark! It's that song, right? All right. See, those who have ears to hear, let them hear. All right, anyway. Merry Christmas, we're so glad you're with us. Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much that you love us and that you've called us, and that even now you're smiling upon us. Lord, you are the most joyful person in the universe. Help us today to capture some of that joy in our hearts. Help us to understand the love and the calling and the purpose that you have for us. Help us to understand that we're redeemed and that we're in your kingdom and care even now, and we ask this all in the very strong name of Jesus, amen.

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

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

Preston Parker, what a gift. Thank you. And choir and orchestra, thank you so much. 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 and frankincense and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. Friends, Emmanuel, God is with us. Hallelujah.

OFFERING INVITATION – Chad Blake

Merry Christmas everyone. Tonight is the night that we celebrate God becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us. And just like the magi, we bring our gifts to celebrate the Lord. If you are visiting us, if you're here with family who attend this church, or you're just from the neighborhood, you are our guest. Just enjoy the music, enjoy an inspiring word. If you're tuning in online for the first time, welcome. We love you. But if this is a place that you call home, we bring our gifts to the Lord and we say Lord, take whatever it is we have, however big or however small, and use it to spread your word around the world, that this church wants to be a beacon of light for the whole world declaring the goodness of God. God bless you all.

Christmas Hope

SCRIPTURE – Luke 2:8-20 - Hannah

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.” 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. Church, Emmanuel, God is with us. Hallelujah.

BOBBY SCHULLER THANK YOU TO ERIN, CHOIR & ORCHESTRA

Erin Wood, what a treasure you are. Thank you so much. What a gift. As I understand it, I think that’s the ninth time in a row she has sung that, and every time its like the first time, because didn’t you sing it like five times yesterday or something, you said, or four times. Wow. Nine times. Nine times. Christmas bonus for anybody who knows what movie that’s from. Ferris Buellers Day Off, that’s right. Well done, choir. That’s the right kind of choir. Thank you, Erin. We appreciate you. Thank you, guys. Thank you. We’re so grateful for our team.

WELCOME – Bobby Schuller

Welcome to Hour of Power. This is a church of happy and whole students of Jesus. We’re actually happy people and we’re proud of joy and hospitality. Its amazing to me how happiness and joy kind of annoys some religious people, and yet it’s supposed to be fruit of the spirit. Don’t trust religious people who are annoyed by happiness. Just don’t trust them. It doesn’t lead down a good path. But we’re so glad you’re with us, and we want you to know that this is the kind of place where as students of Jesus, we want you to grow and thrive in your walk with Him, to not think that you have to be perfect first, but to know that He loves you just as you are.

DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

To affirm the gospel in our lives, we say this creed every week, and so maybe you’ve never been here before, but I want to invite you to say this with us. 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 – “Christmas Hope” – Bobby Schuller

If we could believe that, what freedom we would get. And that’s what God wants for you is freedom. I’m going to preach just a very short message tonight, so short that in that time, you could bake a dozen gingerbread cookies. I promise you; it’ll be that short. Less than 14 minutes. No, a little more than 14 minutes. Anyway. This creed that we just said, this creed is the gospel. See, people try to change it from what it is, but the gospel that we preach on Christmas and Easter and every other Sunday is the idea that in contrast to every other philosophy and religion that says do better, try harder, and when you get your report card to like a B-plus or a B-minus or a C-plus, whatever it is in your own mind or heart, then you can call yourself a – whatever. Then you’re in, then you can go to heaven. Although some Christians wrongly sort of suggest that, that is not at all the Biblical view of the gospel. The gospel is as sinners, as enemies of God, when we hated God, He still loved us. And all of salvation is simply receiving a free gift, an invitation to come home and to be with the Lord. This building that we’re in, actually, is called a sanctuary. Called a sanctuary. It’s a perfect reference on like a night like tonight when its raining, you recognize what a sanctuary really is, whatever it is, a shelter. That’s a Christmas miracle, by the way.

Christmas Hope

Many of you who are watching on television and online are like what's he talking about. I'll tell you. We do not get a lot of rain in California. And I think this is the first time it has rained on a Christmas service since I've ever been here, and it was really coming down. It rained so little outside that when children who grew up in California when it starts to rain, they're like what is this moisture from the.. what's this word again, dad? What's it called? Kids from Irvine are like I thought water just came from Evian bottles. It comes from the sky? And it actually reminds me of a Christmas Eve, my first time I'd ever been to Israel, I was just a punk back then, I was 18 years old, and I went with my grandpa, who was a minister. He brought 500 people to Israel, and Israel is like Southern California. It almost never rains, hardly ever. But because its such a religious country, they really and always have viewed rain as God's blessing, God's blessing, a symbol like they know that its just rain, but it's also like a symbol that like something special is happening right now. I still remember on a Christmas Eve in Bethlehem at night overlooking the city, it was raining all night, and there were 500 of us out there with umbrellas, and right when the service was about to begin, the rain stopped so that we could go up on the stage and pray and sing these songs. Isn't that amazing? We were there with the guy that did Phantom of the Opera, I can't remember his name. Michael Phelps? No, I got it.. Michael.. Michael (MUMBLES NAME) Michael (MUMBLES) Crawford! That is it! Breaker Bon wasn't even close. But I still remember as an 18-year-old many of us, the timing of it was such a wonder, in a way. That right when the service was starting, I think it was 7:00, the rain pouring with umbrellas and then 7:00 came and boom. Stopped. Rain tonight, my hope is that maybe that can be a symbol for you tonight, that God's blessing is even on you now. That tonight you'll receive a special blessing. I know many of you are struggling, you have a challenge that's bothering you, maybe it's a health crisis, maybe it's a relationship. Maybe you just went through a bad breakup or a divorce, or just going through a tough time. Maybe you have your doubts about God or about life or whatever, and you need a second chance. Let's just believe that maybe this rain even for us as Californians, or wherever. Maybe you're from Minnesota, you're like what? But just believe tonight that God has a blessing for you. And actually spiritually, think about opening your heart and mind to the goodness, love, life and power of God in you. He wants to bless you and pour out His goodness in your life. That's the heart of Jesus. Everywhere Jesus goes in the gospels, never making anybody sick. Everywhere He goes, He's healing people, loving people having mercy with people, having meals with people He's not supposed to associate with, right? Just loving people right where they're at. So God loves you just as you are, not as you should be. Stop trying to get it all right. Stop trying harder and just yield your life to His love and kindness. He's so for you. He loves you because He's your father, He's your dad. I want to begin with a little history lesson. I like history. Most people don't but sorry. You're here now, you have to hear it. It was the year 270. It was the last great persecution of the Roman Empire, a young man named Nicholas of Barre, a Greek speaking, Ionian Greek was born into this world. A Christian at a time when Christians were being crucified by Rome, burned alive, fed to lions. It was a very dark and hard time, especially this now very Christian part of the Roman Empire. And this young man devoted his life to God and just simply wanted to bring joy and happiness to people, even though life was so, so dark and so hard for them. Many ways that he tried to do this and then something happened. His parents tragically died, and left him a fortune. He knew they were wealthy, but he didn't know they were this wealthy. And they left him this immense fortune. And as a believer, he felt called by the Holy Spirit to rather than embellish his life and ego, to use it to make people happier, to maybe we could say spread some Christmas cheer. To go around and help people who are hurting. He devoted the rest of his life. He became a priest and a pastor, and Nicholas of Barre decided that he was going to spend his life just giving his money, and even his life away to people in need. There are three kind of odd stories, the second one is really weird. I thought about removing it, but I said I wouldn't so I'm a man of my word. First story goes like this. There were some men who were arrested and were about to be executed by a corrupt magistrate, who had been bribed by these men's enemy who wanted them dead. And knowing this, Nicholas jumped in there, threw his body in front of the sword. Some people say he took the sword and drove it into the ground, preached and chastised the magistrate and the executioners and saved these men's lives. He believed that they knew they were innocent but wanted them to have a second chance. In another story, and I'm going to pre-apologize for this work of medieval art. This is supposed to be little boys, but honestly they look like 40-year-old men that just got like shrunk on photoshop. But this is how medieval art is. You just got to deal with it. That one guy's butt in the front, its supposed to be a five-year-old or something, okay. Somehow he's bald on the back. I don't know what that's about.

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But in that story, Nicholas of Barre saves these children who were being imprisoned and were going to be used by a butcher who was going to kill them and feed them to people. It's a really gross story, but an amazing story that he rescued them. And then the one he's most famous for, he loved to give money away to poor families who couldn't afford a dowry for their daughters. So in the Roman Empire, for a young woman to be married, her family had to pay a dowry, some amount of negotiated money to the family of the groom. And so even if you were a beautiful woman, very often, or very likeable or madly in love with a guy who wanted to marry you, if you didn't have a dowry, it was hard to do it. And so he would just go around finding ways to give money to these families that their daughters could be married. And of course the most famous one was there was this dad who had three daughters, a single dad, and all three of his daughters were in love or had a boyfriend or something, couldn't get married, and so when they were hanging their socks, their stockings up on the fireplace to dry because they were wet from a rainy day, at night he went and he reached his hand through the window and dropped gold coins in their socks so that they could afford a dowry. And that's where we get the tradition of hanging our stockings on the fireplace. If you haven't guessed it by now, the historic figure I'm talking about is St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, Miracle Worker, he has many names. He is the patron saint of repentant thieves. So if you're a thief and you repent tonight, St. Nicholas is your guy. He's the one that's going to.. we're not Catholic, but it's an interesting story. And of course when we read stories about any believer like this, especially when we hear about Santa Claus and how his story sort of begins, I see someone who believes in second chances. That even if those.. I feel like those prisoners, even if they were guilty, he would have wanted them to not be killed, you know what I mean. That those children, that those women, people deserve a chance. You deserve a chance! You deserve a second chance. I believe that for you. And God has that for you, too. Many of us in this room are relatively good people. When we get to know our neighbors, we want them to have a second chance. If they've messed up or lost everything, or really just.. whatever. They mess up their lives. Most of us, in an abstract way, root for our neighbor to have a second chance. But very often we don't want to give ourselves a second chance. Maybe you're that type of person. You look in the mirror and you say there's no second chance for me. Bobby, you don't know what I've done, or what I've been through. In this room are so many people who've done a lot of good, but all of us have also made some big mistakes in our lives. Things we regret. Unfinished symphonies. Sad stories. Lost relationships. Bad decisions. You know what? God's not done with you yet, my friend. He has a second chance for you. And that's what the gospels are about. It's not just a second chance, it's a third chance, and a fourth chance, and a fifth chance, and a sixth chance. Isn't that amazing? Seventy times seven says the Bible. That's how many chances you get. And multiply that times another seventy. And then put in a little finite next to it. That's how much God is for you and not against you. He just wants us, in many ways, and my hope is that tonight you'll believe in that second chance for you, for you that God has a great plan for you. And that you don't have to be wrapped up in the shame of your past, and all of these things. Tonight, of course, we remember Jesus' birthday. This is a party isn't it. That's what a Christmas service is. It's a party celebrating the most joyful person ever, Jesus Christ. And when you think of the nativity, we always think of all those characters who came. Jesus was born in a barn, in a water trough, which would be embarrassing in those days for a king, right? But this is a different kind of king. It's an upside-down kingdom. And it's in this place that all sorts of folks are from shepherds, a lowly position. By the way, those shepherds were teenage girls. If you come to this church, you know that historically they were probably teenage girls. They weren't old men with beards. And there were poor people and rich people and magi and all of these things. When we think of the nativity, we think of an invitation to anyone, anyone who would just say yes, that's for me, too. I'll take a second chance. The gospel is this that when we are messed up or broken or all these things we say to ourselves and beat ourselves up, Christ gave His life for us that we could be saved. Not by our own good works, but by His good work for us. And we just believe that, right? We believe that God loves us, that wants the best for us, and so our moral and everything else, our lives just become a natural response to believing that this is true. There are three things that you are not, and we say it every Sunday. You're not what you do. I remember when I was a kid, I wanted a BMX GTE Elite bike for Christmas, and I got it, finally. And I was thrilled for about three weeks, and then I was kind of over it. It's amazing how what we have becomes so much of our identity: your car, your house, your clothes, your status in life. Or what we do. You've probably been to a work Christmas party and you met a stranger and what's the most common question somebody asks you, if you've never met them before?

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What do you do? And what do you say? It's a way we identify people and we begin to internalize it, that what I do for a living, what I do morally, that that's who I am. Or what people say about us. Man, if somebody says a hundred nice things to me, and one person says a bad thing, what's the one thing I remember? Well if you're anything like me, if you're a human being, it's that one negative thing that you can't.. it just gets in there. So often, we are so bound by the opinions of others, so often we're bound by our need for another thing, or our need to have a better job, or to have some credit. And my friend, all of those things are fine and good, but can I just give you some freedom. Can I give you some freedom right now. That's not what life is about. Life is about understanding in this moment that even if nobody loves you, even if nobody cares about you or notices you, you are the apple of God's eye. I think about my own children and how much I love them. And how broken and messed up I am. The Bible says God is love, and He has that for you. I know a lot of people here don't believe in God, but the Bible also says that if you give just a mustard seed of faith, that you can move a mountain. Maybe most of you doesn't believe in God, but maybe one percent of you does, like there's just a little thing, I want to challenge you today give that to God and see what He can do with it. Stop obsessing about what you have or what people say about you, or what you do for a living, or all of these things, begin to believe for just a moment that you are an absolute treasure, and that's a final stop. That you are a treasure. And that your future, if it's under the loving care of Jesus Christ, is so bright. All of us have a choice. We can follow the Lord whenever we want. You can follow God whenever you want. You can do it today. And all you got to do is make a decision up here, and in here and your life will never be the same. I hope you do that. That's your choice, of course. But we're so glad.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING – Christ Candle - Bobby

BS: I want to invite my family to come up. We're going to light the final candle on the advent wreath. This is my wife Hannah, my daughter Haven and my son Cohen. All three look amazing. Wow. Look at this fine-looking family. Do you have your card, Haven?

HAVEN: The four candles we have lit signify hope, peace, joy and love. Four promises God continually offers to us, and all of them are made manifest in this one we light tonight, the Christ candle. The prophet Isaiah spoke, for to us a child is born, for 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 justice, the joy of authentic Christian community, and the love that encompasses us in 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 His footsteps.

Please break your glowsticks.

BS: Merry Christmas, everyone.

HS: Merry Christmas.

HAVEN: Merry Christmas.

BLESSING & DISMISSAL – Bobby

Thank you all so much. Can we give these musicians, our staff and our volunteers have been here for five services. Can we give them a big hand? Thank you. We appreciate you so much. Thank you. You made it a special day for a lot of people. Of course we hope it was a special night for you. I'm looking forward to, I think, oatmeal pancakes. I'm not a hundred percent sure tomorrow, for me, so many of us have our food in mind, and I'm the only thing that stands between you and that thing. So I will let you go. Thank you for coming tonight. Come back to church sometime. We have church at 9 and 11. We hope you come on a Sunday. 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.