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GOOD MORNING – Bobby Schuller (BS) and Hannah Schuller (HS)

HS: Merry Christmas, friends and family. On that cold, dark night, the way and the truth and the life was born unto us, and we love celebrating that with you, so thank you for being here. We love you.

BS: Let's begin with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much that your Son was born into our dark, hurting world to bring life and renewal, freedom; we thank you and we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, all God's people said, amen.

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

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

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 to them 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.
The word of the Lord.

SCRIPTURE – Luke 2,8-20 – Hannah Schuller

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 that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The word of the Lord.

MESSAGE – Christmas Hope

Well Merry Christmas! What a joy it is to have you in the house with us today. Today is Jesus' birthday. That's kind of a big deal and glad you came to celebrate it. Well I'm going to keep it short today. I know nobody's upset about that. That's okay. I'm the only thing, for those of.. some kids, I remember, get to open one or two presents on Christmas Eve. When I was a kid, we called that cheating. You're not supposed to do that. You got to wait till Christmas morning.

Christmas Hope

I'm the only thing that stands between you and what's coming next, and hopefully that's a really good meal, like I don't know, roasted lamb and cinnamon rolls and egg nog and vegan apple cider. Is there any other kind of apple cider? I don't know. If you have a non-vegan apple cider, that's gross. But I know you're ready to eat. You're ready to spend some time with your family, so I just want to encourage you today – I hope you leave here with your tank full. But this is an interesting time, isn't it. It's a time when we all sort of pause because it's not just Christmas, it's also kind of the end of the year. Many people don't work between Christmas and New Year's. It's an interesting time, so there's a lot of reflection going on. Sometimes that reflecting, we feel really proud and happy with what our year has been. Sometimes we get to the end of the year and we're not so proud. We got like couple extra pounds on, maybe things didn't go the way we wanted to go, and that's okay. We're going to talk about that tonight. It's interesting when I think about the Christmas story, and wonder well what does it mean for you, and it means something for everybody, but what does it mean for you as a person today? If you get this message tonight, your life will change forever. Here's the scenario – a young woman is pregnant with the Son of God, and she's not just a little pregnant, she's very pregnant. There's a point where a woman becomes so pregnant, she starts knocking things over if she turns to look the other way, because of the belly. No? And so she's very pregnant, and she's very cold, and she's traveling with her husband, Joseph, good looking young man. Direct descendant of King David. Maybe he's got red hair, curly hair, I don't know. And the distance between Nazareth and Bethlehem is long enough that in those days it would have taken between four and seven days. Now if you're very pregnant, and you're very cold, this is asking a lot. This happened because Rome wanted to do a census so everybody has to go back to their hometown in Bethlehem, which by the way means bakery in Hebrew. The last time I'm going to show off tonight. It's interesting the bread of life was born in Bethlehem in a bakery. And it was there a small village of two/three hundred people that we imagine an inn and an innkeeper. And of course everybody's going back to Bethlehem and they need a place to stay because it's cold. And you might say wait, hold on, Bobby. That's my name, by the way, if you're new here. Hold on, Bobby. Bethlehem is in the desert, isn't it? Are deserts cold? My friend, it's very cold. Have you ever been to Victorville/Hesperia? That is about an hour from here, maybe an hour and a half, maybe two hours, and it is very desert-y and its very cold, because its three thousand feet above sea level. I realized this the first time I went to Bethlehem; I was 18-years-old, and I went with Dr. Schuller, my grandpa, and he went with, I think, five hundred people from all around the world. And they were visiting from all the nations, and we had this amazing experience where we went out on the field where the shepherds traditionally were, and it was raining, which is rare in Israel, especially in a desert. It's considered a blessing, but of course it's Christmas Eve, and its cold, and it was very cold, almost cold enough to snow. Did you know it could snow in Bethlehem? It often does, and it snows in Jerusalem, as well. Only five miles or so from Bethlehem. I remember that night because all these umbrellas were out, and we were supposed to go live on television, and it really felt like an actual miracle because you could see this clock counting down to when we were going to go live, and they were concerned because of the rain – you couldn't see very well. And right when it started, the rain stopped, and all these umbrellas closed, and we began the candlelight vigil, like the one we're having tonight. And I thought wow, God is good. Not a coincidence for me. What was the Phantom of the Opera guy? What was his name? Michael Crawford. He was there. I got to meet him. Isn't that cool? So Bethlehem is cold. And when I think about the story, I think about this innkeeper, this poor guy who didn't know who was knocking on the door. Have you ever felt overwhelmed, everything's going crazy, something happens, you weren't expecting it, everything's so busy, and there's a moment where you're supposed to help someone and you can't dig deep enough to do it. You say I'm barely surviving, I could barely make it; I'm suffocating as it is. I don't have a room for you, lady. Well that lady was the mother of Jesus Christ. That's a rough one. That's a rough one. If you're going to turn somebody away, don't do that one. And I imagine this innkeeper, because I think about it often, he's got every room full. I wonder, did he have like his own room, the one he was going to sleep in that night. Could he have given it to her? I think very often during seasons like this, we recognize that it could have been a different story if he had given up that room. But imagine this man, this innkeeper lives to be an old man, maybe he lives to be 70, 80, 90, he's a good Jewish guy, he goes to synagogue regularly, studies the word, prays every day, dies in his sleep peacefully, gets to the pearly gates only to realize the one he turned away was Jesus' mom. And there's Jesus sitting at the gates and the man walks up, and Jesus looks at him and says 'so, you want to get in.' But the interesting thing about Jesus is I don't doubt for a minute that He'd let him in and welcomed him with open arms.

Christmas Hope

We don't serve a God who holds a grudge. That's good news. That's the first thing we learn from Christmas is that we serve a God who loves you right where you are, who forgives you right where you are. Here's a good question – how many times will God forgive you when you mess up. How many times? It's a good question. Here's one – how many times will your girlfriend or boyfriend, or your husband or wife forgive you? Depends on how bad it is, I suppose. How about your son or daughter? How many times will your child, let's say your ten-year-old, how many times will she forgive you, or he forgive you? Maybe 20, 25. What about your golden retriever? How many times will he forgive you? Maybe 50! You might get 50 out of a golden retriever. Doberman, you're talking 30. How about a mother? How many times will a mother forgive her child? Maybe a hundred? Maybe a thousand? But even a mother has a limit. Even more than that, how many times will God forgive us when we mess up? And the answer is a million times a million times a million. There is no limit to God's grace and love and mercy for you. So that's what it means when Jesus is born. It's the beginning of the end for the enemy. It is the beginning of the beginning for me and for you. And so when Jesus was born on Christmas Day, something amazing happened. History was broken like a twig between A.D. and B.C. and forever humankind would measure time based on this one event, the most important event in human history. The time when Jesus Christ was injected into the world like anti-venom is injected into someone who has been bitten by a rattlesnake. Rapidly, quickly things begin to change and light begins to strike against the darkness. Maybe you come here this morning.. this evening and you say my life is poisoned, my life is sad, my life is broken. Won't you come to the Lord? Why don't you come to receive Christ today? We live in a place called Irvine, California that has a lot of fancy people, a lot of big paychecks, a lot of expensive cars. There's nothing wrong with that. But it's interesting that when you succeed in life, you can feel like even though you've got it all, something's missing. I know what's missing. There's a hole inside of you and it's in the shape of God, and only He can fill it. So tonight I want to invite you, if you're not at peace with God, you can't be at peace with anything in His world. The good news of Christmas is that Christ was crucified and raised from the dead so that we could be made holy, forgiven, and entirely new creations. So receive Christ tonight. I want to challenge you to do that. That's the good news is that God waits on the porch as a father waits for a son to come home and says come home. I love you. Wow, He loves you, and I love you, too, and I know your best days are ahead of you, not behind you. That's the first thing. The second thing then is if we serve the kind of God who forgives us, loves us, it's our job to pay it forward, to do it for our neighbor. Yes, we need to have boundaries. Yes, we need to use wisdom, but here's the second promise. The promise is that we can become anything and anyone we need to be in God's kingdom by working on ourselves. We serve an it's possible God. That is a good word – possible. Everybody say this after me: it's possible. (AUDIENCE – it's possible) It is possible for you! You come here with bad news from the world, but I have good news for you. It's possible. You say I have a sickness that the doctors can't solve. God can heal that sickness. You say I have an addiction I can't get over. God can heal that addiction. You say I'm just a broken person. I'm a kind of person that I've been carrying the same piece of baggage from one hand to the other, back and forth all this time and I can't seem to set it down, and I say to you this evening, God will take that from your hands. It's possible. All things are possible. Perhaps you resent poverty and sickness. Perhaps you resent the fact that you used to be happy and you're sad. You resent the fact that your marriage used to be so good, and now that person's a stranger. Or that your kids have wandered away and that's not how you raised them, or your parents, or your grandparents, or whatever, that you have some broken relationship. Can I tell you it's possible? The story for you, it's not over yet, but here's where the solution is – the solution doesn't lie on the outside, it lies in here. You're not going to get the solution you want when you get the government you want. You're not going to get the solution you want when your boss comes around and solves your problems, or when somebody on the outside changes. Here's where the change happens – it happens in you. When you make a decision that I can become who I need to be. And not just for you. For the people who love you. You want a better marriage? Become an amazing spouse. You can do it. It means work. A little bit of work every day. You want to be healthy? You can do it. You want to be happy? That's a discipline you can learn. You want to be tougher, stronger; you can learn that. Stop asking God today to make it easier – ask God to make you stronger. Stop asking God to make it simpler, ask Him to make you the kind of skilled person you need to be to overcome. And can I just say you will overcome. You will overcome. The victory is yours. Believe it tonight. The symbol, it's a great symbol, isn't it? The little baby, little baby born on the coldest, darkest night, symbolically, but in our darkness, we think at our lowest, our lowest, boom! That's where God so often comes, isn't it?

Christmas Hope

Maybe you're just like I'm at the end of my rope, I'm at the bottom of the bottom, this is going to be a great part of your victory story. You say Bobby, I'm too young. Hogwash. I'm not even going to waste time on that one. You say Bobby, I'm too old. There's a tough one. But can I tell you, if you feel like you're old, you're too old, all those years you've lived have rolled into all the experience, wisdom and insight that you have today. You're the smartest person today you've ever been. God's not done with you. When He's done with you, you'll be done with this world. Trust me, you're alive. Your best days are ahead, and this is God's message for you. But, your life is like a field, and when you come to a field, you need to sow seed into that field, and you will reap a harvest. Don't tell a field I need, I need, I need. Tell a field here's my seed, and tend to it and you'll get the crops you want. But it takes time. Takes six months, eight months, and hard work, but you'll get there. More than this, I just want you to know you're probably doing a lot better than you think. I'm proud of you, and the Lord is proud of you. I'm on your side and the Lord is on your side. You're forgiven, you're renewed. In fact, let me just bless you now. You will be victorious. You will become who you're called to be. You will get a fresh wind today, just the thing you needed. You are healed, and will continue to be healed. You will be above and not beneath, the head and not the tail, your baskets will be full, and your days will be bright, and I speak it over you in the mighty and strong name of Jesus Christ, let it be so.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING – Schuller Family

BS: All right. Hannah, Haven and Cohen. Is Cohen still here? He's gone. My son. That scarf was darling, wasn't it? Well, I'll take my girls. That's great. We're going to light the last candle. All right. What do you think, right here?

HS: Do you want to read it?

BS: Don't they look lovely? What beautiful dresses you have. You look spectacular.

HS: Thank you, thank you. Do you want to read it?

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 to manifest in this one we light tonight, the Christ candle. 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 the 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 that authentic Christian community, and the love that encompasses us in all our diversity, empowering us with 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: We don't have any candles tonight, but we do have glow sticks. Candles are such a mess and so this year we chose for glow sticks. You can't light anything on fire, but you can break it, and now is the time to do it.

THANK YOU – Bobby Schuller

Amen. All right. At this time, you may blow out your glow sticks. Hey, can we say a very special thank you. We have had five services in a row. This is the last one, to our production team and these musicians and our volunteers for all the work they did. Thank you! Appreciate you. A lot of work.

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 a very Merry Christmas. Love you all. Have a good night.