

WELCOME/INVOCATION – Schuller family

BS: Yes! This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. How are you? Good! Merry Christmas!

HS: Yes. Yes, Merry, merry Christmas. It is such a joy to celebrate with you tonight. Because Jesus was born, we are truly and fully alive. Thank you, Lord. And He is so good, and He loves you right where you are right now.

BS: Can I ask you all to do something kind of uncomfortable? If there's like not a lot of people in your row, can you do a shuffle, like kind of to the middle to create room on the edges so people can sit there?

HS: Thank you.

BS: It's called a shepherd shuffle. They used to call it a Schuller shuffle. The Schuller shuffle.

HS: Thank you.

BS: Yes, people still coming in. Thank you.

HS: Thank you.

BS: That'll be really nice for.. all right, let's begin with a word of prayer. We thank you, Father that your holy spirit is here in the house. And you're here for a reason, God. You're here to break chains, to set people free from their sin and bondage, to bring us together, to bring light and ideas and fresh vision. And most of all, to point our hearts to Jesus Christ, the King of kings, and it's the reason we gather here today is to lift up the name of Christ. And we thank you, Lord. 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 – Robert A. Schuller

RAS: Good evening and Merry Christmas! Boy, it's good to be able to come here and to be able to worship God together. And part of our worship, what we do is we read the Word of God and that's what we're doing. These are from Matthew 2 verses 1 through 12.

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 worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and they 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. May God add His blessings to this reading.

SCRIPTURE – Luke 2:8-20 – Hannah Schuller

HS: Luke 2:8 through 20. 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 heavenly host 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.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

WELCOME/DECLARATION – Bobby Schuller

BS: Well, welcome to Shepherd's Grove. We're so glad you're here. And normally on Christmas Eve, we don't do this creed that we do in church, but I just felt really led by the Lord that we should do it today. Is that okay with you?

Would you stand with me? We're going to say this creed together. And I want you to hold your hands like this as a way of receiving from the Lord. Now, this is true because Jesus Christ laid His life down on the cross for us. And because of that, we who were full of sin and messed up became what the Bible says, the righteousness of God. And it's like when God looks at us, it's like He's looking at Christ. It's not that we're Christ or God, but that we become a new creation. And the Bible says, He who knew no sin became sin, that we would be called the righteousness of God. Isn't that great news? There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So hold your hands like this, 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. It's 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 my neighbor.

Thanks. You can be seated.

DEVOTION – Bobby Schuller – "Christmas Hope"

BS: Well, during this Advent season, we have these candles on the wreath. Now, it's hard when you're from California to not say reef, but it's a wreath. And each Sunday, there's four Sundays in Advent, we count down and have a theme, and we're reminded of these wonderful promises that are given to us in Jesus Christ: hope, peace, joy, and last week we talked about (AUDIENCE – love) love, right? Agape love. The thing that holds it all together.

Today is the final candle, and the final candle is called the Christ Candle. And today I'm going to tell you about that candle. Without that candle, all the others are faded, temporary; impossible to truly have. All hope, all peace, all joy, and yes, it's a joy that smiles, all real love, it comes from God, and it's made available through Jesus Christ. So I want to warn you, I want to give you ten minutes to think about it. But Christmas Eve is a great time to become a Christian. There are some of you here who need to be at peace with God, and my hope is that before you leave here, I will give you the opportunity to do that. I hope you take hold of it. Now, Billy Graham would only give you, like, 30 seconds. I'm going to give you 10 to 15 minutes. That's pretty good, right? That's a fair deal. I'd take that deal. All right.

Now, we're in a season. Going into next year, you're going to have a lot of time, especially if you have the week off, to think about the 2025 version of you. You're thinking about a vision for your life. Maybe you'll ask for a raise.

Maybe you'll finally start that business or write that book. And many of us, we have all these things. How many want to.. don't raise your hand, want to lose a little weight? Join the club, right?

Can I tell you that all of these things are fine to do, and they're valuable, and I hope you do them, but if you're not at peace with God, they mean nothing. If you gather all the gold in the world, if you look amazing, if you're incredibly healthy, if you have friends and family, those are all wonderful things, and God wants them for you. But if you're not full of the Holy Spirit, it's all dust and ashes. It means nothing. But when you have the Lord, it means everything. We're going to ask you to receive the Lord today.

Okay, I want to tell you a story about an innkeeper. Is that okay? I grew up going to a lot of, like, nativity plays and stories. You probably did, too, as a kid; if you grew up Catholic or Christian or something. Even if you didn't, if you grew up in the U.S. or in the west, you probably went to these things. And you always have this part of the story.

How many of you, by the way, saw the Glory of Christmas at the Crystal Cathedral back in the day? That was cool, wasn't it? I still remember.. we got some Crystal Cathedral folks in the house. I remember as a kid how cool it was to go to that year after year, hear my grandpa's booming voice: this is the.. but the coolest thing was, I thought, the animals.

They had live animals that would come on the stage, and right there, a live camel would poop like on the church chancel.. like, that was amazing. I was like, oh, my gosh.

There's this character, though, that's always stood out to me because it's so relevant to the human dilemma, especially the religious and spiritual journey of the human person, and that's the innkeeper. The innkeeper. Because the innkeeper is like a lot of us when we get busy and we've got things to do and we're in a hurry and all this stuff is going on, and then we have this thing that little did we know it's probably the most important decision we made in our life.

Bethlehem is cold. A lot of people don't know that. You think it's the desert, it must be warm. It's not. It's about 3,000 feet above sea level, and it'll snow sometimes. And Mary and Joseph have to go to Bethlehem from a very warm place, Nazareth, which is down by the Sea of Galilee, and they have to ascend for, like, two/three days, and Mary is very pregnant. Now there's pregnant, and then there's very pregnant. Right at the end. Some of you ladies, you know what that's like. You have to go to the bathroom every 30 minutes, and everything is uncomfortable, and you can't find a.. is this right or wrong? I'm looking at Hannah. It's about right? You can't find a position to sleep in.

And so imagine being this young woman, and you know you're going to go into labor any day, you just need a clean place to deliver your baby, and it feels like everything is not going the way you hoped it would. And here's this innkeeper on this cold night in Bethlehem that he was surprised by this random census that Caesar has just.. and so his inn is completely full, and all day, it's (MAKES KNOCKING SOUNDS) no vacancy, right? (MAKES KNOCKING SOUNDS) Knock on the door, another party. I'm sorry, there's no vacancy. (MAKES KNOCKING SOUNDS) I'm sorry, there's no vacancy.

And one day, knock, knock, knock, answers the door, and here's this young couple, this very pregnant Mary. And he looks at her and he goes, oh, my gosh. Right? What does he say? Something like, so I guess you want to get in. And we always think that this dilemma for the innkeeper is whether to send them away or put them up in the barn. But in my meditation, I don't think that was the dilemma, because we always forget that the innkeeper has a room, too, right? Is that right? He's got to sleep somewhere. He's probably got the best bed, doesn't he? He's got the best room with a fireplace and all the things that would make for a great place to lay your head if you've been a pregnant woman on the road for three days.

I imagine - this is just in my head - that his dilemma is between the barn and his own room. Not send her away in the barn. And he chooses the barn. Now, I think this is the dilemma that many Christians are often in, right? I didn't send her away. I put her up in the barn.

It's all I have. And many of us as Christians, we sort of put Christ in a barn. We don't give Him the best. We don't give Him the center. And we wonder sometimes why we wrestle with these other things when we put Christ in a barn and not in our own room.

Well, anyway, I like to imagine, everything went fine, of course. Jesus was fine. They got a house. That's a great reflection. I never realized that. You know that the gold, frankincense and myrrh, dad, this was my dad, by the way, if you didn't know. The guy that was up here before; was worth four million dollars? I just read that.. around that. Four million bucks.

That's pretty good. Okay, where was I?

Oh, yes, the innkeeper. So the innkeeper, I like to imagine this man, a good Jewish man, moral guy, married, had children, had grandchildren. Lived a long, healthy and blessed life. And finally he dies and he goes to the pearly gates and he knocks (MAKES KNOCKING SOUNDS) and there's Jesus. And Jesus says, so I guess you want in. Is that right? That's funny, isn't it? That's a funny image.

The truth is, that conversation never happened. I said that kind of conversation, and those kinds of conversations never happen in heaven. I actually hope and pray that that innkeeper met the Rabbi, the Son of God; that he became a believer, that he was saved from his life of sin and given eternal life and became a part of the body of believers and was born again. And when he got to heaven, there was none of that. Everybody was celebrating the innkeeper. Isn't that a great image?

A few weeks ago, I realized this exact thing happened to the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul, before he became a Christian, was a murderer. As a Pharisee, he went around murdering Christians, putting people who are Christians in jail, beating them, tying them up, separating families. And when Paul died and went to heaven, there was a whole throng of people, filled with people that he murdered, people that he put in prison, and they were all like, Paul! Paul! You made it, Paul! Right? You made it! You got in, Paul! Look at all these people you brought to the Lord. Look at all these lives you touched and healed, Paul. I promise you, there was no mention of the murder, of the beatings, of the evil that he did. You know why? Because that former man died. Those things didn't exist in the book. This is what heaven is about, you see? And this is the kingdom we live in. Won't you receive that gift tonight? Why would you leave here without receiving that gift tonight?

After Jesus is born, as you read through that passage in Luke, it then says that an angel appeared to the shepherds. You know why the shepherds were the first ones? You know why? Because God Himself in the Old Testament calls Himself a shepherd. He says, I am the shepherd of my people, Israel.

I have a good friend and sister in the Lord, Sheila Walsh, and she grew up in Scotland around a lot of sheep. And she told me this story and never forgot it. She said, sometimes the ewe gives birth to a baby lamb, and they don't know why, but the ewe rejects her own baby. It's called a bummer lamb, and they don't know why. Sometimes they think that maybe if the lamb has some kind of bacteria or sick, or if the mother has run out of milk, but for whatever reason, this bummer lamb is rejected by the mother and begins to shrivel. It's like it begins to die in spirit. You see that the lamb hangs his head low and is actually rejected by the whole fold. And the only way that lamb is going to live is if the shepherd raises him himself, and that's always what happens. You can see a bummer lamb because their head falls so low that their nose starts to touch the ground before they even begin to starve. It's almost like they're already dying in spirit.

So the shepherd then comes and raises the bummer lamb himself in his house. He feeds the bummer lamb like milk in a bottle. It's really cute. You can see this. And blankets the lamb and talks to the lamb. And until the lamb gets big enough to feed itself and to go out to pasture, and he weans it off, he just lives in the shepherd's house. And then when the lamb is weaned off, he goes back into the fold and the fold always accepts the bummer lamb.

But one of the interesting things she said is when the shepherd is calling on the sheep and says, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, sheep, like this, it's always the bummer lamb that's way out in front running to the shepherd. Is that good? There are people here tonight, and there are people not here tonight, especially, who think God has no place for someone like me. There are people who are carrying around this heavy burden of something you did, or something that was done to you, or some personal flaw you can't get rid of, like a suitcase you've been moving from one hand to the other. I have seen God turn murderers into saints, drug addicts into world changers. Bummer lambs are God's favorite. I said bummer lambs are God's favorite. But you have to surrender your life to the shepherd. If you don't give your life to the shepherd, you will die. I'm telling you, you will die. You will die. Give your life to the shepherd.

We always want to put Jesus in the barn and as God has become my friend, just as you become friends with someone else and you learn their personality, I have learned that God does not like middle roads. He does not like half-baked pies. He does not like that middle zone. Like the prodigal son; when the prodigal son came home, he said, I'm just going to be a hired hand because I'll get three square meals. And the father said, no, you're either a prince or you're homeless. You're either the ring, the robe, the shoes on your feet, or you're away. You're either my son or you're not my son.

Jesus says there's two roads: a narrow road that leads to life but is very difficult, and only a few people find it, and then there's this wide road that's very easy, and it leads to death, and most people do that one. My friend, choose life. Choose life! Choose the narrow road. It's so worth it. Choose life. It's waiting for you. You can't do it in your own strength. None of us can. We're all bummer lambs. None of us here can do it in our own strength. We need the Holy Spirit. We need the life of God. We need the Word in our veins. Is that right? We need the Lord. We need the Lord.

And here's the big lie - you don't get into heaven by being a good person. You get in by getting it in you. You get in by becoming the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. You get in by believing in Christ crucified and raised from the dead. You get into heaven by getting heaven in you first. And you're so full of heavenly life that when you die, it continues to live on. This is a gift. Get it tonight, my friend. Get it.

All right, my ten minutes are up. What'd you think about my pitch? Some of you are ready. So we're going to do this together. This is literally how I became a Christian. I was riding the fence, and I just went, I'm going to do that. I didn't go down. I was like, I'm going to do that. And I left the building, and I've never been the same since. That's all you got to do. So I'm going to invite you today to stand with me. Stand with me, please, and we're going to pray this prayer together. Now, this is something we do in church all the time, and I know it's a little weird. That's okay, right? This is California. We do this at football games, we do this at basketball games, let's do it in church. Raise your hands like this with me, everyone, as high as you can, and we're going to pray this together. I want you to open your spirit. You may not know what that is, but you know what it is. Open your spirit to heaven to receive from the Holy Spirit, what He's about to do in your life now.

Repeat this prayer after me: Jesus Christ, Son of God (AUDIENCE – Jesus Christ, Son of God) I know that I'm a sinner (AUDIENCE – I know that I'm a sinner) and I ask for your forgiveness (AUDIENCE – and I ask for your forgiveness). I know that you love me (AUDIENCE – I know that you love me). I believe you've died for my sins (AUDIENCE – I believe you've died for my sins) and rose from the dead (AUDIENCE – and rose from the dead). I turn from my old life (AUDIENCE – I turn from my old life). I repent of my sins (AUDIENCE – I repent of my sins) and I invite you to come into my heart and life (AUDIENCE – and I invite you to come into my heart and life). I want to trust and follow you (AUDIENCE – I want to trust and follow you) as my Lord and Savior (AUDIENCE – as my Lord and Savior) in Jesus name (AUDIENCE – in Jesus name) amen (AUDIENCE – amen) amen.

Now, if you prayed that prayer for the first time or the first time in a long time, come talk to me after church. I'd love to meet you and just meet you. Is that okay? I know you got cinnamon rolls and coffee, but come and talk to me if that was you.

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING – Schuller family

BS: Okay, it's time to light the candle. I'm going to invite my family to come up with me. Get your candles out.

HS: Okay, you want to hold daddy's hand?

BS: You want to hold my hand? Okay.

HS: Right. The four candles lit over these Advent Sundays signify four promises God makes to each of us: hope, peace, joy, and agape love. They all come together in the last candle in our wreath, the Christ candle.

It is written in the prophet Isaiah for to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be upon his shoulders and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, everlasting Father and Prince of peace.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God offers us all life, power and healing through the cross and resurrection. Because of Him we are a new creation. The old has passed away and behold, the new has come. Thank you, Lord.

BLESSING & DISMISSAL – Bobby Schuller

BS: It's hard to clap when you're holding a candle, isn't it? Well, Merry Christmas, everybody. We're so grateful that you came tonight. This is our last service. Can we say thank you to the musicians and the production team? They've been here since this morning. Thank you all, we love you. And wishing you all a very Merry Christmas. 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.