

## **Advent Conspiracy - Worship Fully**

Note: The idea for this series and some content comes from a book by Rick McKinley, Chris Seay, and Greg Holder called, "Advent Conspiracy: Can Christmas Still Change the World?"

Doesn't it seem like there's some "Christmas rush" going on in our culture? There have been Christmas commercials on TV for weeks and it seems like we went right from Labor Day to lights downtown.

Black Friday starts for most people the chaos of the Christmas season.

My family and I would hang up lights outside and then we would put up the Christmas tree and all the ornaments. The best part was listening and singing the Christmas songs. Of course I was the only one singing.

We have slowed down this pace over the last few years and things are a lot more calmer now in the Piraino home.

### **The Advantages of Advent**

Against our culture's call to consume the clutter of Christmas, stands the simple yet profound season of Advent. This word means "coming" and refers to a four week period of time of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the birth of our Messiah whom we believe is Jesus Christ.

As well as the waiting of Christians for the return of Christ (the 2nd coming).

I see Advent as a spiritual journey that helps us focus on the greatest gift of all so that we can worship the Word made flesh with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

As we experience Advent, it strikes me that one can never start too early when getting ready for something really big.

We want the beauty of Jesus to shine bright in the busyness of our lives. And that can only happen when we slow down.

We're beginning a new series today called, "**Advent Conspiracy.**" The basic idea is that we want to take back the story of the Savior's birth as we fight against the spirit of consumerism that has stolen the soul of Christmas.

We want to substitute consumption with compassion by practicing four simple, but powerful, countercultural concepts - **worship fully, spend less, give more, and receive love.** This video explains more about where we're headed.

### **Play Video about Advent Conspiracy**

We're going to have to work at it if we don't want our Christmas to crash. To say that we are celebrating a conspiracy means that we're conspiring against our cultural tendency to worship consumerism and instead to turn our hearts toward Christ.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word "**conspire**" refers "**to joining in a secret agreement to do an unlawful or wrongful act.**" While it's not illegal to celebrate Christmas (yet), and I'm certainly not advocating doing something unlawful, we do need to join together to reclaim Christmas from the snares of our society. Interestingly, "**conspire**" also means "**to act in harmony toward a common end.**"

Since the things we desire are the things we end up worshipping, during this time of conspicuous consumption, we must take a fresh look at what really matters. I'm mindful of the fact that many of us sit in church disconnected from the Christmas story because we're so far removed from the original events.

What was once a time to celebrate the birth of the Savior has somehow turned into a season of stress, traffic jams and shopping lists. And when it's all over, many of us are left with presents to return, looming debt that will take months to pay off, and this empty feeling that we somehow missed its purpose.

What if Christmas became a world-changing event **again** by turning our focus back to the birth of Christ? What could happen to your family if this focus was celebrated in loud, bold and unexpected ways?"

Do you remember the tree that **Charlie Brown** ended up with and how he expressed his great frustration? In the midst of all the stress and the disappointment he yells out, "**Does anybody remember what Christmas is all about?**" **Linus** comes over to Charlie Brown and says, "**I know what it is all about**" and then he quotes the Christmas narrative from Luke 2. The lights go down and the simplicity of the Savior-story takes center stage.

How do we recalibrate our souls? How do we get back to the real reason for the season? Why is it that the time of the year when worshipping Jesus should be the easiest is often the hardest? What is Christmas all about? Let's not allow another Christmas to pass us by like a blizzard, leaving us to shovel through shattered ornaments, dead tree branches, and broken dreams.

What would happen if instead of acting like bystanders to the nativity, we would enter the story as participants? Here's what I think: When we understand Christmas more deeply, we will worship Christ more fully.

We see this in how the Christmas characters responded when they encountered Immanuel. Their worship sprang from deep places of the heart that were touched for the first time by God-in-the-flesh. If you have your Bibles with you, please open them up to Matthew 1. Keep one finger there and then turn over to Luke 1-2.

Worship is at the heart of Christmas and as we study these responses we'll see a compelling picture of praise because when we understand Christmas more deeply, we will worship Christ more fully.

The birth of Jesus is not on par with Rudolph and Frosty and Santa. This is not just a time of fuzzy sentimentality, as we sing about a "wonderful Christmas time." It's a time of wonder and awe and worship.

Since worship is what we all long for, let's take a look with fresh eyes at the Christmas characters to see how they responded to the birth of the Savior. After we look at each individual and how they responded I'll ask a probing question that will help us apply these **actions** to our lives.

Let's take a look at these Christmas characters.

Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah, she was a teenage girl engaged to marry a poor carpenter named Joseph. **I love how God uses nobodies to do something great.** When the angel Gabriel appeared to her, she was troubled and afraid but as she listened to an explanation of what was going to happen to her, she responded with words of surrender in **Luke 1:38: "I am the Lord's servant...may it be to me as you have said."**

### 1. Mary offered

**Q: Have you ever offered yourself in surrender to the Lord as His servant?**

\*To answer in the negative means you are not Worshipping Fully.

When Mary went and stayed with her cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist, Elizabeth exclaimed in **Luke 1:44: "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy."**

There's something about being in the presence of Jesus that should cause us to jump for joy, isn't there?

### 2. John Jumped

**Q: What's holding you back from jumping with joy when you are in the presence of Jesus?**

Joining the rich tradition of poets and prophets, Mary composes a song of devotion to her Lord in **Luke 1:46-55.** Let's look at just the first two verses: 46-47 **"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."**

### 3. Mary magnified.

Mary's song is known as **"The Magnificat,"** which is Latin for magnify. **Like a magnifying glass that helps us see what is often unseen,** Mary bursts out into praise, extolling God's attributes and His concern for the humble, helpless and hungry.

**Q: In what ways does your life magnify the Lord so that people can see Him?**

\* Do you remember when someone magnified Jesus to you and showed you the true meaning of Christmas?

Joseph has a problem. His fiancée is pregnant, and the baby isn't his. Though he could have flipped out and exposed Mary to public shame and punishment, his plan was to end things quietly. And that's when the angel appears to him in a dream and tells Joseph to not break his pledge to Mary, because her baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

He's told in **Matthew 1:21** that she will have a son and that Joseph is to give him the name Jesus, "because He will save His people from their sins." I admire Joseph for his immediate obedience as stated in **verse 24**: "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."

#### **4. Joseph obeyed.**

Joseph reminds us that the call of God isn't always easy or conventional, but it is always right - and God will give us the courage to follow if we're willing to obey. When we understand Christmas more deeply, we will worship Christ more fully.

**Q: In what ways is the Lord calling you to obey Him this Christmas season?**

\*For Brenda and I it is to help a family in need. To us that is what the season is all about.

Let's go back to the narrative in **Luke 2:13-14**. After giving the good news of great joy to the shepherds, we read this: "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.'" The angels explode with praise as they contemplate how peace will now be given to people who were previously at war with God.

#### **5. Angels adored.**

**Q: If the angels adored and gave glory to God, in what specific way can you do the same?**

The next characters we will look at are the shepherds. Despised as thieves unfit for polite society, the shepherds lived on the outskirts of towns and were shunned by most people. **Don't miss this - God loves the overlooked!**

Choosing them to celebrate the good news of the Savior's birth, we read in **Luke 2:15** that they are very eager to see the Savior: **"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."**

These slow-moving men, who were used to lazily walk with their sheep, put it in high gear and scurried off to the stable in **verse 16: "So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger."** And then, after seeing the Savior, **verse 17** tells us that they **"spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child."**

## **6. Shepherds hurried**

**Q: In what ways do you need to confess your hesitancy and instead be in a hurry to worship?**

**\*admit your schedule is too full and schedule time to spend specifically with Jesus.**

Some days after Jesus was born Joseph and Mary took Him to the Temple to present Him to the Lord. A man named Simeon had been waiting for a long time for the Savior to be born and **Luke 2:26** tells us that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he wouldn't die before seeing the Lord's Christ. Moved by the Spirit, he comes face-to-face with Jesus in the Temple and **verses 28-30** say that **"Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation...'"**

## **7. Simeon praised.**

It's not easy to wait, is it? Simeon waited a long time for God to show up. It's when we wait, that we can be moved to worship.

**Q: Are you still moved to worship Jesus as you were when you first meet with Him?**

**\*Common trait when most people meet Jesus for the first time is zealous - outwardly grateful.**

After hearing what Simeon said we read in **verse 33** that **"The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about Him."** Though they had both been told that their son was the Savior, I'm sure they had a difficult time comprehending everything. **The word "marvel" means "to admire" or "wonder."**

## **8. Joseph and Mary marveled**

Every parent is pleased when someone says something nice about their child but this was much more than that. Perhaps they understood that Jesus was the Savior for Israel but **when Simeon stated that He was also "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" in verse 32**, it took a while for them to fully understand that He is the Savior of the whole world. What Simeon said went way beyond what the angel had outlined.

**Q: What will you do differently to make sure you spend time marveling this Christmas?**

**\*Marvel at how God chooses to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things and believe He can do the same with you.**

As Joseph and Mary continue to wonder and marvel, they then encounter an elderly widow named Anna. I love how God orchestrates the timing of everything in life. **Check out verse 38: "Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem."**

## **9. Anna witnessed**

She had waited a long time to see the Savior and now she couldn't help but thank God and speak about Jesus to everyone in Jerusalem. I recognize that Thanksgiving is over, but we should never stop thanking or stop telling people about Jesus.

**Q:How can you use the Christmas season to speak about the child who brings redemption?**

Many months later, perhaps up to two years, we read about some scholarly astronomers coming from Persia to worship the one born King of the Jews. When they finally find Jesus we know that they gave expensive gifts to Him but I want you to notice what they do before they give their gifts.

Turn back to **Matthew 2:11**: “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped Him. Then they opened their treasures...”

The word “worship” here means “having fallen, they prostrated themselves and intensely adored Him.”

## **10. Wise men worshipped**

God is more interested in our bowing than with the bows we put on our gifts. He wants us before He wants what we have. Or to say it another way, He wants to own us before we give Him what we own. He wants our hearts before He wants what’s in our hands; He wants our presence, more than our presents.

**Q: How would you rate your worship? Have you ever fallen before Him in faith and received Him into your life?**

When we understand Christmas more deeply, we will worship Christ more fully.

**Then there are those who refuse to worship.**

As I read through the nativity narrative, I see two groups who won't worship. I wonder if you find yourself in one of them.

There are those who are like Herod. He goes crazy in his attempts to kill the Christ of Christmas. Maybe that describes you. Frankly, you don't care for Christmas and you're not all that crazy about Christians either.

1. I call these **The Intolerant**.

Or maybe you're more like the religious guys who totally missed the coming of the Messiah. They were so caught up in their rituals and routines that they missed Christmas. It's easy for the religious people to take Jesus for granted.

2. I call these **The Indifferent**.

**Truth:** Action Flows from Adoration

As I read the Christmas narrative again this week, it struck me that it's impossible to stay the same when we encounter the Savior because **adoration always leads to action**.

**Worship leads to work.**

The story of Christmas is still unfolding and it still inspires action. **Here are some ways we can choose to enter the story.**

1. **Tell the story of Christmas because it's our story to tell.** Instead of getting all bent out of shape when a store employee says, "Happy Holidays," let's remember that Christmas is our story to tell.

People will tend to ask you "**Are you ready for Christmas?**" In our culture that means, "**Is your shopping done?**" We want to recapture what Christmas really means so we can leverage our conversations for Christ.

Here is an answer I came up with: "**My family and I have started a Christmas tradition of helping a family in need. We have cut back on gifts for each other and do this to remind us of the true meaning of Christmas**".

2. **Sit down with your family and discuss how you can approach Christmas differently this year.**

**Ideas:**

\*Manage your schedule coming into the Christmas season in a way in which worship is front and center for your family.

\*Ask each member of your family which Christmas Character they most want to model - Mary who offered and magnified, John who jumped, Joseph who

obeyed, the angels who adored, the shepherds who hurried, Simeon who praised, Joseph and Mary who marveled, Anna who witnessed, or the wise men who worshipped.

\*Use an Advent Wreath and read part of the Christmas story from Scripture every day.

**3. As you strive to worship fully this Advent, be thinking of ways you can spend less so that you can give more.**

This quote by Eric Hoffer has really messed with me: **"You can never get enough of what you don't need to make you happy."** Instead of buying what people don't need with money you don't have to impress people you don't like, **here are some worthy ways to give this season.**

\*Spend less on your gifts to each other and give to a family in need. Involve your children in the process.

\*On December 18th we will be giving our offering, except that which is designated for tithing, for some worthy causes that Pastor Tim has selected. He will tell you about them next week.

\*Get together with your small group and chose a cause and do something for others. We are giving you some suggestions in the lobby on the wall.

For more ideas on how to give your "presence" this season, visit:

[www.adventconspiracy.org](http://www.adventconspiracy.org).

**4. Invite at least three people to one of our Christmas services on December 24th-25th.**

Let's Worship Fully this Christmas season like we were created to do!

I want to read to you a true story that a close friend of mine in this church wrote down of an experience he had with the Lord here recently.

This is how you Worship Fully.