

For our mid-week Advent services, the message will be based on the book, *Advent Conspiracy*; Can Christmas still change the world? As we begin, it is important to look at the current emphasis of Advent for many people.

Advent is a time for preparation for the coming of Christ. But for many people, it is all about consumption and consumerism and as a result, these people are obsessed with the climax of getting stuff. They become lost in the crowded malls and debt. The false doctrine of consumer religion insists that money equals love. As a result, we worship less. We spend more. We give less. And we struggle more.

The *Advent Conspiracy* is not a 4 point checklist on how to do Christmas but is a story of how God entered our world to make things right. As we move through Advent, our topics will include worship fully, spend less, give more, and love all. Tonight we begin with worship fully.

Our hearts are formed by what we worship. Excitement, anticipation and hope all abound the object of our deepest affection. As we begin Advent, what is it that makes you excited? The answer should be Jesus, but is Jesus the honest answer?

Does the way we spend our time, money and energy testify that we worship God? What do you desire as we move towards Christmas? These desires can become what we worship because we think that somehow, they will finally fulfill us.

Advent is the time of the year when worshiping Jesus should be the easiest but it is often the hardest. We sit in church disconnected from the story because we know deep inside we are too far from the stable to see much of anything.

But each year, Advent brings another opportunity to worship Jesus in the miracle of his incarnation. We see the various people in the story of the birth of Jesus and most of them respond with worship. Their worship came from their hearts which were touched by God while reaching out to all humanity in a new way.

We begin with Mary who was a young teenage girl. The angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her that she would have a child and name him Jesus. When Mary asked how she could be pregnant because she was a virgin, Gabriel said that the Holy Spirit would come upon her. There are a couple of things to cause her fear besides her young age and the Holy Spirit causing the pregnancy. She was engaged to be married and so if she becomes pregnant outside of marriage, Joseph could call everything off and she could be stoned to death. Instead of responding to those fears, Mary said, "Here I am, the Lord's humble servant. As you have said, let it be done to me." That is an incredible example for us to

follow. Instead of letting fear control our actions, she followed God knowing that HE would be with her.

When Mary went to Elizabeth who was pregnant with John the Baptist, Mary responded with what is known as the Magnificat which is a song of devotion that she sang while with Elizabeth. Please open your Bibles to Luke chapter 1 beginning with verse 46.

Mary worshiped God with her whole being while she was pregnant with Jesus.

Next we have Joseph. Joseph who is the earthly father of Jesus has a problem. In that day, he has a huge problem. His fiancée is pregnant and he is NOT the father. Joseph did not want anything to happen to Mary which is why he decided to dismiss Mary quietly. But then an angel appeared to him and told Joseph not to send Mary away because the baby was conceived by the Holy Spirit. After the angel appeared to Joseph, he did keep Mary as his fiancée and he stood by her throughout the pregnancy even though he probably had some fear of what others would think or say.

Joseph chose to be obedient to God when it came to Mary. Some say he was a fool and you could expand that to a holy fool who gave up his rights and reputation because of a call from God.

One of the common fears people have about the Advent conspiracy is what their family and friends will say or think about them. After all, it does sound a little crazy in this day and age to encourage people to spend less, give more and to use our money to love our brothers and sisters around the world. But Joseph reminds us that while the call of God isn't always easy, it is always right and God will give you the courage to follow through if are willing to obey.

God chose to share the tremendous news of Jesus' birth with a group of people who did not have a good reputation. Shepherds were often despised as thieves who were unfit for a more respectable job. They were not even allowed to give testimony in a court. And yet we are loved by a God who loved them. God looks at our hearts and not at our place in society which is why HE chose to celebrate the good news of Christ's birth with a group of people who were invisible to most of society.

After the angels appeared to the shepherds, they went to Bethlehem to see for themselves even though they were busy tending their sheep. While there, they testified to Mary and Joseph about what the angels had told them and when they left, they told the same story to all who would listen. So the same group of people who could not testify in a court did in fact testify to what God was doing in the world.

During this season, are we willing to stop and witness this miracle? Are we willing to stop long enough to look upon the savior who is Christ Jesus and then share the good news with those we meet?

The wise men were also called kings and were men of great importance. They noticed something in the stars and began a very long journey that would take them to whom the ancient texts foretold would be born King of the Jews. They did not know God. They were not even Jewish but were from Persia and Babylon.

They met with King Herod and asked him about the location of the newborn king. And after consulting with his scribes, Herod told them what he knew and told them to come back and tell him where the baby is so that he could go and pay homage. But we all know that Herod really wanted to kill Jesus.

When they finally found their way to Jesus, they gave him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The wise men show us what happens when you get a glimpse of the true worthiness of Christ. Just like them, we too will travel the world to meet him, confront dominant world systems and give our all for our king.

Whoever we are and where ever we find ourselves, we are learning to worship with the wise men as we travel the world to share the gospel of Christ with all people. What do you think might happen if we worshiped as the wise men did? What transformation would occur as God's people moved across the world loving Jesus with our time, attention, and money?

As followers of Jesus, our options are clear. We can live in the story of a corrupt world or we can enter the story of God through Christ in this world. If we choose to live in the story of God through Christ in this world, then we cannot remain silent. Like Mary, we will sing to our redeeming God. Like Joseph, we will obey without regard to the cost. Like the shepherds, we will leave our busyness to worship Christ and share that message with the world. And like the wise men, we will confront anything that stands in the way of our worship.

Christmas changed the world the day Jesus was born in a cold, dark stable. Christmas will change the world again.