

The Advent Conspiracy – Worship Fully
Matthew 2:1-2, 7-11
GCF – November 15, 2009

I. Introduction

SIGNIFICANT PORTIONS OF THIS MESSAGE WERE TAKEN FROM THE BOOK, *ADVENT CONSPIRACY: CAN CHRISTMAS STILL CHANGE THE WORLD?*, BY RICK MCKINLEY, CHRIS SEAY, AND GREG HOLDER.

The Advent season will soon be upon us, and if I were to ask you what or who we are to worship in this holiday event we call Christmas, I would assume that your response would be, “Jesus.”

Someone recently said, “Once again, we come to the Holiday Season, a deeply religious time that each of us observes, in his own way, by going to the mall of his choice.” ~Unknown

Does the way we spend our time, money, and energy testify that we worship Jesus Christ and His coming to earth to live among us?

Simply saying that we worship Jesus does not mean that is what we are actually doing. God spoke through Isaiah the prophet and said:

“They honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (Isaiah 29:13, NLT)

The fact that we need to worship fully is at the heart of the Advent Conspiracy.

First, for those who may not know, what is Advent?

Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas (often the Sunday right after Thanksgiving) and is a time of preparation for the celebration of Christ’s birth.

Usually what we think of as the “holiday season” (Thanksgiving to Christmas day) is actually the season of Advent where we celebrate the first coming of Jesus (His Advent) and anticipate His Second Coming.

Christmas traditionally runs from December 25 until January 6 (the twelve days of Christmas).

To say we are celebrating an Advent Conspiracy means that we are conspiring against our cultural tendency to worship **consumerism** and material things during this season and to fix our hearts to worship **Christ**.

This year, we want to share some ideas that we believe will help us enter more fully into the Christmas story. To engage in an Advent Conspiracy is to: worship (God) fully, spend less, give more, and love all.

Today, let’s look at what it means to worship fully.

II. Worship Fully

Eric Hoffer said, "You can never get enough of what you don't need to make you happy."

Yet, for many, this Christmas will be another year spent in the frantic pursuit of stuff. Stuff for others and stuff for ourselves, but will anybody truly be any happier for all the stuff we receive or give?

This time of year when worshiping Jesus should be the easiest is often the hardest. The invitation to join the Advent Conspiracy is a call to remain in the gospel of Jesus and worship Him – no matter how strongly the cultural demands of Christmas pull at us.

This story of the first Advent (coming) of God has for most of us lost its meaning. The fact that the Savior of all humanity came to a backwater town on the outskirts of an empire and was born to a young peasant girl in a barn has been repeated so often that we have lost the sense of how wonderful this story is.

All that we could ever truly need in this life and the life to come has been given to us through this baby in the manger, but every time we look for fulfillment at the mall, we take another step away from the manger and the good news that came with Him.

This Advent we need to return to the Nativity. We need to relive the story. Today, let's look at four people and their initial response to the Christmas story.

A. Mary

Mary was a teenage girl engaged to a poor carpenter named Joseph. She was a seemingly insignificant peasant from an insignificant town – yet she was called upon by God to be the mother of the Savior.

Mary's response to God's call was one of **humility** and worship.

First, she responds by saying, "*I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.*" (Luke 1:38, NLT)

Second, she composes a song of adoration: "*Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. 47 How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! 48 For he took notice of his lowly servant girl, and from now on all generations will call me blessed. 49 For the Mighty One is holy, and he has done great things for me. 50 He shows mercy from generation to generation to all who fear him. 51 His mighty arm has done tremendous things! He has scattered the proud and haughty ones. 52 He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands.*" (Luke 1:46-53, NLT)

How can we join in Mary's song?

With Mary as our model, let poets pen poems, musicians compose songs, and prophets stand and call us to see what God sees: the birth of His Son signifies the beginning of the end of injustice.

Let our worship be an outpouring of our hearts. Let us take Jesus seriously and begin to desire the same things that move His heart. Let our worship drive us from the enclosure of church walls out into the painful places to cry out for God's **liberation**.

B. Joseph

When we think of the birth of Jesus we often overlook the role of Joseph. In relationship to this incredible story of God coming to earth we forget that Joseph was faced with a big problem. His fiancée was pregnant and he was not the father.

While this may be no big deal today, in Joseph's day this was a crime punishable by death. Mary could have been stoned to death.

What was he to do? He could expose her to public shame and punishment, but instead decided to end things as quietly as possible.

Imagine the heaviness of his heart – his future bride had been unfaithful to him.

As he was wrestling with these thoughts, he fell asleep and had a dream:

“Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ...24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. 25 But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.” (Matthew 1:20-25, NLT)

Joseph's response to the birth of our Savior was one of **obedience**.

He knew there would be ramifications; he would lose his reputation and standing in the community because of this call from God.

But he took Mary home to be his wife.

How do we respond like Joseph to this incredible story of a Savior coming to earth?

We do not worry about what others will think when we try to follow the call of God. We remember that although the call of God is not always easy or conventional, it is always right.

Like Joseph, when we act in obedience to God's invitation, in spite of the social cost, we can know that in some way we are extending God's kingdom here on earth.

C. The Shepherds

Shepherds. Often despised as thieves who were unfit for any other occupation, their testimony was not allowed in court nor their presence in polite society.

Yet we are loved by a God who sees the overlooked. He looks at our hearts, not our place in society. It is amazing to think that at the birth of this miracle child, the literal Son of God, God chose this lowly group of Shepherds to celebrate the news.

“That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. 9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, 10 but the angel reassured them. ‘Don't be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. 11 The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!’ ...13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, 14 ‘Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.’ 15 When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, ‘Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.’” (Luke 2:8-15, NLT)

Are we willing to **respond** to the call to leave our worldly responsibilities and hurry off to see the miracle of the Savior? To pause from all our strivings and labor long enough to look upon the Savior who is Christ the Lord?

Will we once again miss the invitation to come and worship?

D. The Wise Men

The wise men were scholars and astrologers who traveled a great distance in response to a change in the star patterns in the sky.

Some believe their journey lasted up to two years. Whatever the time, it was long and strenuous.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem they gained an audience with King Herod, revealing that these were men of renown and influence.

Now Herod was a tyrant who ruled and controlled the people by military power, financial strength, and technological development. But Jesus came to us in vulnerability, solidarity with the poor, and self-sacrifice.

Which king is worthy of our worship?

Now these Magi were not playing the worship games which many who call themselves Christian are guilty of.

They not only offered costly gifts, but they were willing to travel across the world and face possible death (by Herod) in order to worship this one true king.

“After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! 11 They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod.” (Matthew 2:9-12, NLT)

Our worship must be reborn. We must have a fresh glimpse of the true **worthiness** of Jesus Christ, and like the wise men be willing to “travel across the world” to meet Him, confront the dominant world systems, and give our all for the true king.

III. Application

The Christmas story is a story that changed the world.

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.

The first option requires you to do nothing; the second option requires that we give our all to God and it will radically change our lives.

[Show clip from the Matrix]

We also have a choice to make, not only for this Advent and Christmas season, but for the rest of our lives.

Will we, like Mary, sing our songs of worship to our redeeming God? Like Joseph, will we obey without regard to the cost? Like the shepherds, will we leave our busyness to worship Christ? And like the wise men, will we 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 can still change the world today.