**The Advent Conspiracy Reading #1: Worship Fully**

**Pastor:**

The word Advent means “coming,” and the Advent Wreath reminds us of the things we can and should be doing to prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord Jesus... both his *first* coming, which we celebrate every year at Christmas, and also his second coming, which he promised to us: when the love of many had grown cold and some had fallen asleep in their waiting, is how he said it, like a thief in the night for unexpectedness, he would come again to establish his Kingdom of love and joy and hope and peace on the Earth.

**Reader #1:**

The weeks of advent are always a time of preparation. *Physically* we prepare for the celebration of that *first* coming; and spiritually we prepare for the second.

**Reader #2:**

And first on our list of preparations, this year, is to prepare our hearts with a spirit of worship.

**Reader #1:**

From Christmas choirs to Children’s Pageants

From candles to concerts to Carolers out in the snow,

Everything about this time of year reminds us that

The Coming of the King always has and always will

Inspire worship in the hearts of his people.

**Reader #2:**

This is very, very old, the Christmas Spirit of Worship.

**Reader #1:**

When the Virgin Mary first learned

That she would be the mother of the Messiah,

The Bible says that her heart overflowed with worship.

And she sang, “My heart magnifies the Lord!”

**Reader #2:**

And later when the shepherds

Heard the song of the angel choir

Singing Glory to God in the Highest,

And they followed it and they found him,

It says that they too bowed down and worshipped the child.

**Reader #1**

And later still, when His star in the east

Led curious wise men to his crib,

while his mother marvelled,

They offered up their gifts and worshipped him.

[*light candle*]

**Reader #2:**

And so we light this first candle of Advent

To remind us that whatever else we do to prepare for his coming

We must cultivate in our hearts the readiness, the willingness,

Even the reckless abandon to worship fully at his feet

**The Advent Conspiracy Reading #2: Spend Less**

**Reader #1:**

The first candle of Advent reminds us that the Spirit of Christmas is really a Spirit of whole-hearted Worship.

[*light first candle*]

**Reader #2:**

On this second week of our Advent Conspiracy,

We pause to consider how counter-cultural, how radical,

Maybe even how subversive it would be

For us to choose to *spend* *less* this time of year,

When everything around us seems to be screaming at us, “more.”

**Reader #1:**

Buy more, get more, give more.

Have you sealed all your Black Friday deals yet?

Have you scratched every name off your Christmas list, yet?

Have you racked up enough bills, yet?

Or is there more, still, you have to buy, and do, and wrap, and get?

**Reader #2:**

Sometimes it feels silly,

Maybe even a bit sacrilegious

For us to say “Jesus is the Reason for the Season”

This time of year

**Reader #1:**

The one who came to give us divine simplicity, pure contentment and holy rest?

Is he the reason for all of this hectic buying and frantic acquiring of stuff?

Is he really the motive behind all this rushing around and getting?

**Reader #2:**

And so we wonder: what if our Christmas worship, this year,

Included a joyful, honest, hopeful and contented “no”

To the consumerism, and the materialism, and the discontent

That bombards us especially at Christmas time?

**Reader #1:**

What if this was the Christmas where we said “no”

To the “more, more, more” of our culture

Where we chose to spend *less* at the mall,

So we could spend *ourselves* more fully on Him?

[*light candle*]

**Reader #2:**

May this second candle of Advent

Be a bright reminder that there is, actually,

A better way to celebrate the birth of that

Poor homeless, outcast, peasant baby boy

Who was, in fact, the Saviour of the World

Than simply to spend more.

**The Advent Conspiracy Reading #3: Give More**

**Reader #1:**

This year we find ourselves caught up in a conspiracy through the Advent Season

We are conspiring to Worship Fully

[*light first candle*]

And to spend less

[*light second candle*]

**Reader #2**

And we are conspiring, this morning, to “give more.”

**Reader #1:**

It’s no accident, of course, that gift-giving

Has become so closely associated with this time of year

Jesus himself was, and is, God’s most precious gift to us.

And right from the start,

His coming has prompted all manner of gift-giving in return

**Reader #2:**

When three learned star-gazers

Followed the omens at his birth

And found him lying in the lap of his virgin mother

They gave gold and frankincense and myrrh in humble awe.

**Reader #1:**

And later when he came to eat in the house of a tax-collector

Who’d climbed a tree to get a glimpse of him

That tax-collector gave half of all he owned to the poor for pure joy.

**Reader #2:**

And later still, when he came to the house of his friends

The week before he would be executed

A woman named Mary gave a pint of pure perfume

Poured a year’s wages-worth over his feet

And wiped it with her hair in deep gratitude.

**Reader #1:**

So no wonder we give gift

To celebrate the birth of

This Saviour.

**Reader #2:**

And yet, we wonder

How can some product, produced and packaged and purchased

In a Shopping Centre somewhere by nameless and faceless strangers

Really express the love, the joy, the peace and the hope

That this birth means to us?

**Reader #1:**

And how much more could we express that

If we chose, this year to give those things that money

Could never buy?

**Reader #2:**

The gift of hospitality, extended to a stranger

The gift of time spent laughing and playing together

**Reader #1:**

Something made or prepared

With the passion and the talents

That God has given us

Sharing his gifts with those around us

[*light candle*]

**Reader #2:**

May this third candle of Advent

Challenge us to give more this Christmas

To give those gifts that no purchase at the mall

Could every replace,

Gifts that bless others with the love and joy and peace

That is ours in the birth of the Christ-Child.

**The Advent Conspiracy Reading #4: Love All**

**Reader #1:**

All through the Advent Season we have been conspiring to do Christmas differently this year

We have sought to Worship more fully

[*light candle 1*]

To spend more intentionally

[l*ight candle 2*]

To give more carefully

[*light candle 3*]

**Reader #2:**

And today, on this last Sunday of Advent

We are conspiring to Love All

**Reader #1:**

Because God so loved the world that he gave

His one and Only Son

**Reader #2:**

And at just the right time

God sent his Son

Born of a woman

Born under the law

So that we might be adopted as his

Beloved sons and daughters

**Reader #1:**

The Love of God Himself appeared to us

In flesh and blood

Bright light scattering our darkness

New Life bursting up through the cracks of our deadened hearts

The Sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings

**Reader #2:**

And so, of course, a love-less Christmas,

A Christmas where we did not open ourselves

To be filled with this love

So that it spills over out of us

And into the lives of everyone around us

**Reader #1:**

A Christmas where we did not aspire

To be brimming vessels of his love

Wouldn’t really be Christmas at all.

[*Light candle 4*]

**Reader #2:**

May this fourth Candle of Advent

Remind us that the goal of all the other weeks

Worshiping fully and spending less and giving more

The point of all that is simply to open ourselves

To the work of the Holy Spirit

Promises to shape us into people that “Love All”

If we will let him.

**Reader #1:**

For Christ’s sake, and his glory alone

Amen.

**The Advent Conspiracy, Christmas Eve**

**Reader 1**

This year through our advent preparations

We have been engaging in a little conspiracy

The Advent Conspiracy we called it

Because we were conspiring to celebrate Christmas with a difference the year

[*Reader 1 will light candles through this next piece*]

**Reader 2:**

We’ve conspired to worship *differently*—with all our heart soul mind and strength

We’ve conspired to spend *differently*—choosing to spend less and on things that mattered more

We’ve conspired to give *differently*—giving those things that money could never buy

And We’ve conspired to love *differently*—loving all, and loving, especially, in concrete, tangible, practical ways.

**Reader 1:**

Who knew that all the time we thought we were conspiring

The real conspirator was actually God

As he’s been leading us steadily to this night

Where we remember the ultimate Conspiracy of all.

**Reader 2:**

He conspired to show the world his glory

Through the humility of a shamed and outcast Hebrew Maiden

He conspired to show the world his power

In all the weakness of a homeless baby

And he conspired to conquer darkness

**Reader 1:**

Replacing all our fear, and striving and despondency and selfishness

With Christmas hope, and peace and joy and love

**Reader 2:**

To conquer all our darkness

With a tiny ember of holy light

Glowing newborn and beautiful

In the borrowed manger they lay him in.

**Reader 1:**

And tonight we steal away

In our thoughts and in our hearts and in our imaginations

We come to Bethlehem and see

The new born King who is the Lord

Of God’s Advent Conspiracy.

**The Advent Conspiracy, Lighting the Christ Candle**

**Reader 1:**

And so our conspiracy of love is finally complete:

Christ the Saviour is born

And all our waiting and preparing and hoping and long

Comes together, not (of course) in *this moment*

But in the moment that this moment reminds us of

The virgin birth of an infant Messiah

Wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger

**Reader 2:**

*Arise, shine for your light has come*

*And the glory of the Lord rises upon you!*

**Reader 1:**

Is how the Prophet Isaiah said it so long ago

**Reader 2:**

*The true light that gives light to everyone*

*Was coming into the world ... The Word of God became*

*Flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

**Reader 1:**

Is how the Gospel of John says it.

**Reader 2:**

*And this will be a sign to you*

*You will find a Baby wrapped in cloths*

*And lying in a manger*

Is how the angel said it on the night he was born.

[*Light Christ Candle*]

[*Pastor will pray extemporaneously*]