



a d v e n t
C O N S P I R A C Y

Resisting the Empire

Matthew 2

When Christ was born the empire was threatened and as a result Herod, who was one of the more powerful kings of the day, ordered the killing of all the children two years and under who were in Bethlehem. The reason for this was that he hoped to take out the child-King that posed a threat to his kingdom.

As a group, read the narrative of Christ's birth in Matthew chapter two. What stands out to you?

The coming of Christ was an announcement of the coming Kingdom of God. It is a kingdom not of this world – a kingdom that challenges and confronts the kingdoms and power structures of this world. While we don't live in Herod's kingdom, we do live in a kingdom that needs to be challenged and confronted by the coming of Christ and His kingdom.

While there are lots of areas in our culture that the coming of Christ challenges, we want to focus on one. We live in a kingdom, an empire of consumerism and materialism that daily threatens and challenges our faithfulness to Jesus. This stands out so clearly at Christmas-time. Do we really worship Christ at Christmas or are we worshipping ourselves? What gets the bulk of our time and energy? What do we most look forward to at Christmas?

Part of saying "yes" to Jesus means saying "no" to over-spending and over-consumption. We say "no" to these things so we can create space to say "yes" to Jesus and His reign in our lives.

The National Retail Federation today released its forecast for the upcoming 2007 holiday season, predicting that sales will rise 4.0 percent this year to \$474.5 billion.¹ That's BILLION not Million. The average family spent approximately \$907.00 last year on Christmas presents.² Most families work for months after Christmas to get out of the debt they accrued celebrating the birth of Christ. Do you see the irony in going into debt to celebrate the act of incarnation that brings us freedom?!?

The Advent Conspiracy challenges us as Christ-followers, to resist a culture that tells us what to buy, wear and spend with no regard for bringing glory to Jesus.

¹ The National Retail Federation, "Citing Economic Concerns, NRF Forecasts Holiday Sales Gains of Four Percent" September 20, 2007. http://www.nrf.com/modules.php?name=News&op=viewlive&sp_id=370

² American Research Group, Inc., "2006 Christmas Spending Plans Hold Steady" November 22, 2006. www.americanresearchgroup.com/holiday

Read Matthew 2:11. The magi worshipped Him and as an act of worship they presented gifts to Him. How interesting that we have taken this practice and turned it toward ourselves. We now give gifts to each other to celebrate Jesus birth. We don't do this anywhere else. We don't go to a birthday party for a family member and bring everyone else gifts, ignoring the person whose birthday it is. And yet, this is exactly what Christmas has become – an excuse to celebrate ourselves in the name of Jesus.

Now, we are NOT saying that giving gifts at Christmas is wrong, bad or sinful. We ARE saying that if we wholeheartedly participate in it while giving half-hearted worship to Jesus something is terrible wrong.

One of the things that Christ-followers really don't do well is talk about money - especially with each other. While it may be awkward and intimidating, we believe that it is a very important part of life and community. Jesus was never shy talking about money. We'd love for you to spend some time in community getting real with each other about money and Christmas.

Approximately how much money did you spend on Christmas (gifts, decorations, trees, etc..) last year?

What would a reasonable amount be?

Spend some time making a budget for Christmas this year.

- 👉 First, make a list of all the people (family, friends, neighbors, pastors ☺, etc...) that you want to give a gift.
- 👉 Second, decide on a fixed amount that you will spend on Christmas. Make sure to include expenses for meals, decorations, trees, etc.... Decide on it and stick to it. We would like to challenge you to at least make it 50% less than what you spent last year.
- 👉 Third, decide on a fixed amount that you will spend on a gift to Jesus this year as a tangible act of worship.

