



ADVENT CONSPIRACY

Spend Less! — Retail or Revolution?

Matthew 2:1-18

Sermon Outline based on a sermon by Pastor Doug Humphreys, Creekside Covenant Church, Redmond, WA

This sermon is one in a four-part series encouraging congregations as they join the [Advent Conspiracy](#) and Give More, Spend Less, Worship Fully and Love All.

1. **Introduction**

- *Introduce Black Friday with a video: [Black Friday shoppers make a mad dash for deals](#), [Shoppers go crazy on Black Friday, 2010](#), [Black Friday crowd goes crazy at Walmart 2011](#), [Black Friday: Doors open for biggest deals ever](#)*

2. **Somebody Stole Christmas**

- **Missing Christmas:** It's Christmas, where we celebrate the birth of Jesus, God incarnate, come to restore all that is broken in the world and in us. Yet as we move into the Christmas season, very often it is so busy and so rushed that it just gets past us.
 - Have you ever gotten to Christmas Eve and thought, "Wow, that one got away from me"?
 - Have you ever thought or heard others say in the busyness and rush, "I can't wait for this Christmas to be over"?
- **We Need More Christmas, Not Less:** The problem is not that we have *too much* Christmas; the problem is that we have *too little*. We don't need a smaller story of Christmas, but a bigger one.
 - While we've been distracted, Christmas has been infiltrated; it has been stolen away from us without us even noticing: Christmas has become Black Friday and Cyber Monday. It's become the flat-screen TV, the Xbox, the check list of things we need to get before we run out of time. And then we make it, just in time, and it's over.
 - But what is the alternative? Boring church? A boring story? If that is all there is, I'll take the flat-screen TV.

3. **What story of Christmas are we telling? A Boring Story?**

- What's the greatest evidence that Christmas has been stolen? People think that the Church's story of Christmas is boring.
- The Christmas Story, the story of Jesus' birth and all that it meant and means, boring? "Scandalous." "Dangerous." Those are better words. Boring? No way.

- *A Scandalous Story*: Christmas is a scandalous story. God enters a dark world and invites all who live in oppression into a new life of abundance, peace and rest.
- *A Dangerous Story*: It's a dangerous story set in dangerous times. Jesus entered into a world under the thumb of a ruthless and dangerous empire. Christmas is a revolutionary story.

4. **In order to appreciate the danger and the scandal, we need to remember the setting of the *real* Christmas Story.**

- **“Caesar is lord”**

- 2000 years ago, the world was under the thumb of the Roman Empire. The Roman emperors—called Caesars—ruled with an iron fist.
- They marched armies into villages and demanded allegiance. If you did not bow the knee and agree, “Caesar is lord,” you would be killed, and your village would be burned. Village after village, nation after nation fell in this way so that Rome and the Caesars could rule the world.

- **Local Rule of a Vast Empire**

- Eventually, the Roman Empire stretched for thousands and thousands of miles. But how do you rule the people of a conquered nation day-to-day from such a far distance?
- Answer: You select a local ruler and make him your puppet to rule on your behalf. “As long as you do what we say, we will let you live, and you can rule this.” You keep the local ruler under your thumb, and he in turn keeps the people under the thumb of Rome. In this way, you control the world.
- In Israel—the land of God’s chosen people—Rome picked a young warrior by the name of Herod and named him king. Herod was ruthless, paranoid and opulent.

- **Ruthless:**

- Herod marched into Jerusalem with 11,000 foot soldiers and 6,000 more on horses.
- Herod committed wholesale murder. According to one historian: “They were determined to leave none of their opponents alive.”
- Herod announced that he “took power by the will of god,” all while killing thousands of Jews to establish his kingship.

- **Paranoid:**

- It is said that Herod would put on disguises and walk amongst the people to listen to what they said. If he heard anyone say anything negative about him, he had the person executed.
- Herod confronted his sons who he believed were plotting against him. They plead with him, stressing their love and loyalty. He had them killed. One was drowned in a pool.
- Herod argued with the governing body of the Jewish people, the most esteemed religious people. They disagreed with him. He had them all executed.

- **Opulent:**

- Herod built palaces and pools at the top of mountains where there was no water. He made harbors where there were none. He even moved a literal mountain to a place he more desired through the work of an army of slaves.
- To support the opulence of Herod and his elites in Jerusalem, the average Jewish person paid up to 90% in taxes and fees. The taxes were unsustainable.

- The people lost their family lands, the lands promised to them by God, ended up in debt, in poverty, oppression, slavery and hopelessness.
 - This is Herod. This is the King of Israel at the time Jesus was born. This is the backdrop to the Christmas story, a story of a people waiting – and beginning to give up hope: “But we’re supposed to be God’s people.” “Where are you, God? You promised.”
- **God’s Promise and Waiting**
 - God had promised. . . *“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD Our Righteousness.’”* (Jeremiah 23:5-6)
 - 700 years before the birth of Jesus, God said through the prophet Isaiah: *“The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”* (Isaiah 7:14)
 - And God’s people waited, and waited and waited, as a ruthless king, a puppet of an iron-fisted empire, oppressed them and killed anybody who he thought was a threat. “God, have you forgotten your promise and your people?”
- **The Coming of the Messiah**
 - And then, as these weary people were being forced to travel to census stations so they could be counted and controlled, a pregnant teenage girl – a virgin – traveled with her fiancé to a little town called Bethlehem.
 - *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.* (Luke 2:6-7)
 - *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”* (Matthew 2:1-2)
 - These Magi came with news of a new king, a king who is not Herod. How do you think Herod feels about this? “Just another person to kill.” *When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.* (Matthew 2:3)
 - It does not surprise us that Herod was troubled. But why was all of Jerusalem troubled with him? For the rich and elite who benefit from the system of Rome, Herod provides a certain lifestyle. But if a new king has been born it means that Herod is in trouble—and their whole source of power and wealth with him.
 - The Magi ask, *“Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”* *When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”* (Matthew 2:4-6)
 - The birth of this baby threatens the whole system. This could be trouble. *Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”* (Matthew 2:7-8)
 - The Magi were suspicious, so they side-stepped Herod. They went and they worshiped Jesus and then returned home. *After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and*

they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. (Matthew 2:9–12)

- God himself warned Joseph: “*When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt. (Matthew 2:13–14)*
- *When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.*
- *Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” (Matthew 2:15–18)*

- **The First Christmas Was Dangerous**

The first Christmas took place in very dangerous times. It challenged everything; it threatened the very center of the structures of power. Matthew, the writer of this story, specifically chooses how he will begin telling the story of Jesus. He begins with “Herod is King” and all that that means. With just a few words, Matthew paints the portrait of an oppressor who has everyone in bondage. Hopelessness, oppression, poverty; the Empire is winning. And then in the corner of his empire, a little baby has been born—a baby who is a king.

- **The First Christmas Was Revolutionary**

The first Christmas wasn’t a boring story or even a cute little story. It was a revolutionary story. It was the kind of story that could get you killed. Imagine if you heard this story at this time, and you are one of the people being oppressed by the Roman Empire. You think, “What if it is the true story and the other story—the story of the Caesars’ eternal rule—is not true?”

5. **Revolution Again**

Jump forward 2,000 years to (*Name of the Church*) on the Sunday after Thanksgiving—the first day of Advent—and a voice whispers: “What if the story is true? What if the story of Christmas that we have been told by the empire is not the true story?”

6. **Join the Revolution, Join the Conspiracy**

The Christmas business is a big business. Americans spend \$450 billion on it. We are told *that’s* Christmas. We are told “that’s the story.”

The story of Jesus’ birth threatened the powers that be—and it still does. In him is life, and that life is the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

Christmas is a story of revolution. It’s a dangerous story set in dangerous times. Under the thumb of an empire that controlled people in ways they were not even fully aware of. And it still is.

Christmas is the scandalous story of God entering a dark world. This Advent Season, we will conspire with the Light to reclaim the story of Christmas, to enter again into the scandal of a God who became a little baby.

7. **Our Challenge:**

- Spend less, because so often we end up just feeding the false story.
- Spend less, because we get spent.
- Spend less, because we miss out on Christmas as it becomes a list to check off.
- Spend less, and instead give more, give relationally, give the gift of presence.

To the extent you choose to step into this, you will find that Christmas will be new and fresh again. You will create memories that last long past those of other Christmases.

As we spend less, we give more – to family, friends, and beyond.

With the money that we all save, we can step into the love of God by giving in ways that Love All, that bring freedom and deliverance. As a community we are going to pool the money we save to help free people from slavery.

Enter the story of Christmas. Reclaim the story of Christmas. Enter the revolution. Enter the conspiracy.