

# *The Cost of Christmas*

## **Introduction**

For an introduction to this series, please see the front page of the October magazine.

The starting point for this series and these notes is the book 'Advent Conspiracy' by Rick McKinley, Chris Seay & Greg Holder, along with the accompanying material found on the website of the same name.

The four principles explored are directly from the book:

1. Worship Fully
2. Spend Less
3. Give More
4. Love All

The notes themselves are deigned to help us apply these general principles from the book (published in the US) into our specific context as members of Christ Church here in the UK in 2011.

If you have practical ideas during the series on how you could put some of the principles into action, maybe you'd like to share them in a service or in the church magazine.

Happy Christmas!

# **Growth Group Notes**

## **Oct-Nov 2011**



# The Cost of Christmas

## 1: Worship Fully

### WELCOME

**Even if you don't normally do this –please do it this week!**

In 1 minute, each write a list of as many things as you can that you need to do to get ready for Christmas.

Then take a few moments to mark which you think are the most important to get done. Then share together what you've written!

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...*

Sing a Christmas Carol –then read through the words and think about them.

### WORD

These passages will be very familiar. So...

Each imagine you are one of the Magi or shepherds or Mary or Joseph. As one person reads the story, imagine what you would be feeling, hearing, seeing... even smelling!

**Read Matthew 2:1-12 & Luke 2:1-20**

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

# Growth Group Notes

## Oct-Nov 2011



Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Our English word 'worship' comes from 'worth-ship' –something we give 'worth' or 'value' or 'priority' to.

- From the exercise you started with (see Welcome section), what do your lists say about what you give worth to at Christmas?
- In Matthew 2:11, the Magi 'worship' Jesus –bowing and presenting gifts, but in what other ways have the Magi shown the importance to them of this new-born king? What costs have there been to them?
- How many ways can you find that the shepherds worshipped?

If worship is about 'worth-ship' as well as loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving our neighbours as ourselves...

- To what extent is worship about or not about the following? Discuss each in turn...
  - \* Sundays
  - \* Singing
  - \* Feelings and Emotions
  - \* Individual Choice

(The sermon of Sun 3-Oct should have helped on this!)

- How would you answer someone who said at the end of a church service: 'I didn't get anything out of the worship this morning'?
- Jesus told us to Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). Which of these do you easiest/hardest?

## **WHAT NEXT?**

- In 2s/3s: Talk together about a few practical ways you could do things differently this Christmas if you made 'Worship Fully' a top priority. If necessary, have a go at changing your list from earlier.
- Pray for one another. Pray also for the church's preparations for Christmas services and events –that we would worship fully.

# The Cost of Christmas

## 2: Spend Less

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...*

Talk about a time when you got something you really wanted for Christmas. How did you feel? How long did the feeling last? What made the present special?

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...*

Darken the room. Place strips of cloth or some baby clothes in the middle along with a cross. Read Luke 2:1-20. After verses 7, 15 & 20, sing together the chorus of O come all ye faithful ('O come let us adore him...'). Finish with a time of quiet.

### WORD

This is Week 2 of 'The Cost of Christmas' - 'Spend Less'

#### Read Matthew 6:19-34

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Imagine 3 scenarios...

# **Growth Group Notes**

## **Oct-Nov 2011**



1. A relative sends you a standard charity Christmas card. It explains that she's chosen to give the money that she would have spent on you to buy chickens for a project in Africa.
2. A friend says to you that instead of giving him a Christmas present, he'd like you to donate the money to a particular charity.
3. A busy relative gives you a smaller present than usual, but she also offers to come and cook you your favourite meal as a treat.

For each, discuss: How would you honestly feel? What has been the real cost to the giver? What messages does it give to the receiver?

- Can you think of ways that you could spend less money on Christmas presents but give people things that they value more?
- How would you feel about asking people to spend less money on presents for you this Christmas? (be honest!)
- Jesus' teaching in verse 24 may seem a bit extreme. Do you agree? What does it mean to 'serve money'?
- What does it mean to prioritise God's kingdom (v33)?
- We are told that debt is a cause of many of the world's current financial problems and yet we are encouraged to spend more to boost the economy. Based on today's passage, what do you think Jesus would say about these messages?

## **WHAT NEXT?**

- Discuss practical steps that you could take to encourage less spending of money this Christmas. Pray for one another.
- Pray for those in the world who have much less money to spend than you this Christmas.

# The Cost of Christmas

## 3: Give More

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...*

Have you ever received a gift that you really didn't want? What was it? (Don't say who gave it to you!)

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...*

Each take off your watches (pretend if you don't have one!) and put them in the middle of the room. Spend time praying – (praise, thank you, sorry, please etc) in relation to the time you've been given and how you spend it. You may want to use last week's reading Matt 6:25-34 or James 4:13-17.

### WORD

**You could light the room by candle light for your discussion as a reminder of Jesus coming as the Light of the World.**

**Read John 1:1-14**

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What was the cost of Christmas for God?

## **Growth Group Notes**

### **Oct-Nov 2011**



- Have you ever felt hurt because someone didn't recognise you? How do you think God felt when the world didn't recognise his son (v10)?
- How do you feel if someone doesn't like a present you give them? How do you think God feels about his son being received or rejected (v11-12)?
- How can God's example of giving in this passage shape our view of Christmas?
- How could you share with others something of what God's given you this Christmas?
- Christmas is a huge event here today. In what ways do you think this draws more attention to Jesus or less? What part can we play?
- *'We spend more money on Christmas, but give less'*. In what ways do you agree or disagree with this statement?
- How can we encourage children to enjoy giving, instead of just getting –both through what we say and the example we set?

## **WHAT NEXT?**

- Discuss: How could your Christmas become more about 'presence' than 'presents' this year?
- Each write down the initials of someone who you would like to discover the light of Christ this Christmas. Pray for them (& invite them to a Christmas service or event!)
- Pray for the Salvation Army, Operation Christmas Child and other organisations who distribute presents to families who can't afford much at Christmas.

# The Cost of Christmas

## 4: Love All

### WELCOME

*Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...*

Jesus gave us his life. If you were to be remembered for giving one thing to someone or something, what would it be?

### WORSHIP

*Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...*

Each try drawing a set of 4 symbols or shapes to summarise the Advent Conspiracy slogan: 'Worship fully; Spend less; Give more; Love All'

### WORD

**Read Luke 4:16-22**

**Discuss** your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Materially we are rich in the UK, but in what ways are we 'poor'?
- In what ways can we bring the good news of Jesus to those who are spiritually 'poor', imprisoned, blind or oppressed this Christmas?
- To what extent are our celebrations of Christmas today in the UK, 'good news to the poor'?
- In what ways can we be good news to those who are literally poor, imprisoned, blind or oppressed around the world this Christmas?



- Read Matthew 25:34-40. How important and personal do you think these things are to God this Christmas? How can this motivate us?

In Luke 4:20: Everyone's eyes were fixed on Jesus.

- How would Christmas be different for you if your eyes were fixed on Jesus?
- How would Christmas be different in the UK if everyone's eyes were fixed on Jesus?

## **WHAT NEXT?**

- 'Love All'. How could you practically show more love for more people this Christmas?
- Spend some time reflecting on the different actions that you've thought of doing during this series. Try and identify one or two practical actions that you can each do differently this Christmas. Maybe you've already started?! Encourage one another and pray for one another specifically.
- You could share some of your ideas with the wider church –on a Sunday or in the magazine!
- Continue to pray for our Christmas events and services at Christ Church this Christmas (Carol Services, Schools, Old People's Homes, Coffee+Communion, Christmas lunch, Nativity, Churches Together Service, Christmas Lights etc)
- Pray for our nation that Jesus would be more central to the celebrations.

Have a great Christmas!