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Dear North Park Family,

The Advent season is the Christian tradition's annual preparation for Christmas. However, that does not mean that Advent is meant to be only—or even primarily—about looking back. As Fleming Rutledge puts it at the very beginning of her book Advent: The Once and Future Coming of Jesus Christ:

Since the Advent season has been so closely linked to Christmas over the years, it may be startling to hear that Advent is not simply a transitional season but in and of itself communicates a message of immense, even ultimate, importance. Of all the seasons of the church year, Advent most closely mirrors the daily lives of Christians and of the church, asks the most important ethical questions, presents the most accurate picture of the human condition, and above all, orients us to the future of the God who will come again.

But how does Advent do this by preparing us for Christmas?

Advent is meant to function by helping us remember what it was like before Jesus was born into our world, and the joy of his advent (i.e. his "coming")—so that in doing so, we would pray and long for him to come again. As the hymn *O Holy Night* so beautifully puts it, "long lay the world in sin and error pining, till he appears..." That is a word that speaks not only of the past, but of the present. It speaks of the past because before Jesus' first advent, the story of our world was one of God's pursuit of us, and our constant rejection and failings. No matter what God did, his chosen ones fell short time and again. Even though God loved us and had a glorious vision of what this world was meant to be, the

power of Sin and Death seemed to be too strong. Until God himself came. Until God chose himself—chose to take on flesh and be born into this world. When that event took place, it was the beginning of Sin and Death being overthrown and the hope of a new creation being offered where we would be with God forevermore. Jesus' first advent was the coming of an assured hope.

Nevertheless, as we know all too well, Christmas was only the beginning. Yes, God has come. And yes, God has won the victory over Sin and Death through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus is our King and Savior who reigns now over all things. But the unveiling of that reign, salvation and God's Kingdom has still not taken place, so that the church could bear witness to Jesus' work before the end comes. Thus, we live in the time between the times. Salvation has arrived, and yet we wait. The King has been enthroned, and yet we long to see him. God has come—Christmas has happened—and yet we long for His second advent. This is why our lives continue to be a mixture of joy and deep sadness. In fact, Christmas is a time where so many are reminded of how much they don't have, or have lost! While many of us will have a wonderful Christmas this year, many will experience a Christmas that is full of pain. Perhaps you will spend that day alone. Perhaps you will spend that day separated from those you love either by geography or by relational strife. Perhaps you will spend it without a loved one who you lost this last year. Or perhaps you will simply be overwhelmed by the amount of war and suffering going on all over the world. These are not unique experiences. Because, while Jesus has come, the world is still lying in sin and error pining, till he appears again.

Therefore, as strange as it may sound, Advent is the season where the church is meant to intentionally remember how broken our world is. But we are meant to remember this brokenness so that we would look forward with an assured hope that God will come again to make all things new. That is exactly what Advent is meant to help us do with hope. Advent is meant to help us look back and remember what God has done, so that we can long for God to come again with the assurance of hope that he will do just that. This is what we are seeking to do together through this Advent season, and it is why we have put this booklet together.

Throughout this booklet you will find information on things like our advent services, a prayer gathering, advent readings, along with an invitation to join together in the daily practice of silence and solitude. We would encourage you to not only join us in participating in all of these things, but to deepen your grasp of why they are important through the information provided here. We are not simply looking to remember what God has done, but to live with hope because of the assurance of what God will do. He will come again. May we look forward to that day with faith and hope.

Your Co-Leads,

Wanda Silvester and Joel Miles

Advent Schedule

An Advent Prayer and Worship Night - Joy of Every Longing Heart

December 1 at 7:00pm

As the Advent season begins, we invite you to come and take a moment to pause, to worship and pray together, to rediscover our sense of hope, and to reflect on how our losses, our suffering, and our longings can actually help us to grasp the full meaning of Christmas.

Advent Sunday Services

Each Sunday in December we'll gather together and work through a portion of the book of Isaiah. Our musical expressions will vary each week, featuring an acoustic set, worship led by our Children's Choir, Adult and Youth Choir, and a special Orchestra service.

Dec. 1	Isaiah 1 <mark>:1-2:5</mark>	An Unplugged Christmas
Dec. 8	Isaiah 7:1-9:7	Children's Choir
Dec. 15	Isaiah 11:1-10	Adult and Youth Choir
Dec. 22	Isaiah 24:4-6, 19-23; 35:1-10	An Orchestral Christmas

Christmas Eve

December 24 - Christmas Eve Candlelight Services 3:00pm | 5:00pm | 7:30pm Childcare is available for children ages 0-3 at 3:00pm and 5:00pm.

Christmas Day

December 25 - Christmas Day Carol Service 3:00pm

An Encouragement to Invite Others

"You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

- Augustine of Hippo

As we enter this season of longing, it is important to remember that the church is not unique in its hope for a better world. No matter someone's background or beliefs, we are made for God, and feel restless until we find him and rest in him. That means that all people we come into contact with, from our family members, to the people we pass on the street are longing for the hope of Christ and his second coming. Because of this, as we journey through this season of Advent, we want to encourage each of us to be praying for at least 1 person that we know and seek to invite them to one of our Advent or Christmas services. You may not yet know who this person should be, and that is okay. But each week of Advent this booklet will give prompts for whom the Lord could use you to pray for, and to possibly invite to a service.

This Advent season I'll be praying for

Practice: Silence and Solitude

"It's there, in the quiet, that we win or lose the battle for our minds' attention and hearts' affection." – John Mark Comer

When is the last time you sat quietly for more than five minutes? Even getting to five minutes can seem impossible for many of us. In her book *Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place in the Digital Age*, Felicia Wu Song discusses a recent study that found that many college students elected to intentionally inflict themselves with a painful electric shock, rather than sit quietly at an empty desk doing nothing else at all. The reason they did this, Song notes, is because of our intense aversion to boredom. As she highlights, next to anger, boredom has been shown to be the most commonly suppressed emotion. We are simply very bad at patiently waiting.

And yet, one of the marked features of the Scriptures is the common call to things like endurance and patience. "Wait for the Lord," the psalms tell us over and again! Yes, we are meant to be those who are able to wait patiently for the Lord to work, and Advent is the season when we are meant to intentionally lean into this patient endurance.

However, as we have already noted, this is something we struggle to do. In fact, this is almost certainly more true in our day and age, where we carry around devices that enable us to never have to wait (or at least never have to be bored while we wait). For we are a people who cannot be in a line, stopped at a red light, go to the bathroom, be in a meeting, or even walk down the street without our phones being used to entertain or enlighten us at all times. Thus, if we are to be a people who seek to learn to long for Jesus' second Advent,

we cannot only proclaim that Jesus will come again, but take up practices that help us wait patiently for His arrival.

Therefore, this season we want to invite you to join us in seeking to daily take up the practice of silence and solitude. While the amount of time may vary for each person, we encourage you to seek out at least 15 minutes of silence and solitude each day. A time without your phone, without music, without any other device to pull your mind and relieve it of the boredom. This does not mean that your mind will not wander. It will! That is okay. But we encourage you to give yourself to this time, where you intentionally resist those longings for relief from the boredom, so as to intentionally practice dependence on God and longing for His presence to be the remedy.

We want to long for God to come again. So often we let ourselves believe the lie that something else will satisfy that longing. But only the second Advent of Jesus will truly fulfill our longings. Let us intentionally seek to practice this through committing to a time of daily silence and solitude during this season of Advent.

Readings on the Promises of Jesus' Return

"By contrast one of the marks of the biblical counterculture will be a confident hope that makes hopeful action possible even in situations which are, humanly speaking, hopeless. That hope is reliable, because the crucified Lord of history has risen from the dead and will come in glory." – Lesslie Newbigin

Alongside the practice of silence and solitude, we want to immerse ourselves in the story of the Scriptures. As the quote above indicates, one of the distinct marks of the Christian Church, is that we are meant to be a people of hope. And, that our hope is not wishful thinking, but reliable hope, because the crucified and risen Christ will come again. This is the hope toward which we long to look during this Advent season. Because of this, as we seek to immerse ourselves in the story of the Scriptures, our readings are structured to help us lift our eyes toward God, his promises of renewal, and the vision of those promises being fulfilled. Therefore, each reading is part of a three-day cycle that will take us from a promise on day one, to an initial fulfillment through Jesus' first Advent on day two, to the ultimate fulfillment on day three. We will go through this cycle seven times. taking Sunday's off in order to focus on our sermon series in the book of Isaiah. Furthermore, we encourage you to pick at least one reading each cycle to read through with your roommate, family, or friend, in order to engage this practice in community.

Sermon Series/Readings

Sunday, December 1

Sunday Service: Isaiah 1:1-2:5

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Cycle 1: Longing for a Renewed Creation

Day 1—Monday, December 2 Genesis 1:1-5, 1:26-2:25

Day 2—Tuesday, December 3 Colossians 1:15-20

Day 3—Wednesday, December 4 Revelation 21:1-5

Pray that God would widen our hearts to love all his creation. Pray for family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers who both know the Lord and don't. Pray for God to reveal people to you who you may be able to invite to one of our services.

If you can, perhaps write down the name of someone in your life you would like to consider inviting. Begin praying for them specifically.

Cycle 2: Longing for Justice

Day 1—Thursday, December 5 Genesis 3:1-24

Day 2—Friday, December 6 Romans 3:9-26; 5:12-21

Day 3—Saturday, December 7 Revelation 12:1-12; 20:1-15

Pray that the Lord would help you rest more fully in the promise that Jesus will come again. Pray that you would be able to show that hope to others in your life.

Pray for an opportunity to invite your friend or family member to a service. Consider getting together with this person for coffee or a meal.

Sunday, December 8 Sunday Service: Isaiah 7:1-9:7 **Notes**

Cycle 3: Longing for a Unified People

Day 1—Monday, December 9 Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21

Day 2—Tuesday, December 10 Galatians 3:7-4:7

Day 3—Wednesday, December 11 Revelation 7:9-17

Thank God for the coming of Christ in our broken world. Pray that you would more deeply recognize the glorious grace of the coming of Jesus.

Pray for your friend/family member. If you have already invited them, continue to pray that you would genuinely love them, and that God would show them his loving grace. If you have not yet had a chance to invite them, pray for organic opportunities.

Cycle 4: Longing for a Reversal

Day 1—Thursday, December 12 Exodus 13:17-15:21

Day 2—Friday, December 13 Luke 1:39-56

Day 3—Saturday, December 14 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 50-58

Pray for God to reverse the horrors of our world through the coming of Jesus. Ask God to enable you to live with the hope that one day, all the pain caused by sin and death will be gone. Pray that your friends and family members would come to have that hope as well.

Sunday, December 15 Sunday Service: Isaiah 11:1-10 **Notes**

Cycle 5: Longing for God's Glory

Day 16—Monday, December 16 Exodus 33:12-34:7

Day 17—Tuesday, December 17 John 1:1-18

Day 18—Wednesday, December 18 Revelation 21:22-22:5

Pray you would know God more fully and deeply. Ask God to give you eyes to see His glory in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and to long for Him to return.

If you have been able to invite, follow up the invitation with a phone call, lunch/coffee, or having them over for dinner. Continue in prayer.

Cycle 6: Longing for a King

Day 19—Thursday, December 19 1 Samuel 16:1-13; 2 Samuel 7

Day 20—Friday, December 20 Luke 1:26-38

Day 21—Saturday, December 21 Revelation 5

Thank God for the coming of Jesus and how He is the only one who is worthy to redeem our world. If you have not had a chance to invite someone, pray for an opportunity to invite someone today. Trust the Lord that if this opportunity is not given, that is okay! But honestly ask the Lord to give you an opportunity.

Sunday, December 22 Sunday Service: Isaiah 24:4-6, 19-23; 35:1-10 **Notes**

Cycle 7: Longing for God to Come

Day 23—Monday, December 23 Ezekiel 34

Day 24—Tuesday, December 24 Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 2:1-14

Day 25—Wednesday, December 25 Revelation 22:6-21

Join in prayer saying: "Come, Lord Jesus, Come!"

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Coming Up at North Park

January Sermon Series - Book of Acts

Starting January 5, we will be returning to the books of Acts to work our way through the rest of the story of the early church and God's mission through his people.

North Park Youth restarts Wednesday, January 15, 2025 If you are Grade 6 to Grade 12 join us for an exciting time of connection, fun, and growth. Whether you're new or have been with us before, it's the perfect time to get involved as we dive into a fresh season together.

Housing Insecurity Missional Conversation - Thursday, January 23, 2025

This event aims to spark conversation and inspire action as we explore how our community—and our church—can make a difference. Together, we can help create positive change for those experiencing housing challenges.

Pancake Tuesday, March 4, 2025

Invite your friends and join us in the gym for a pancake dinner as we prepare to enter into the season of Lent.

Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Join us once again for an Ash Wednesday service as we enter into the lenten season and prepare our hearts to worship God for the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For more information on North Park, our ministries and upcoming events please visit our website northpark.ca or northpark.ca/register.

