Dear friends, as we gather during this season of Advent, the church's time of waiting, longing, and hoping for light in darkness, and as we consider the way that the prophets waited, and longed, and spoke of the coming light into a dark world, I'd like to share a surprising story from our contemporary culture: the story *KPop Demon Hunters* and its song "Golden." It may at first seem an unlikely source for spiritual reflection; an animated film, a cartoon, with a pop music soundtrack — but I believe there's a message here for all of us who wait with hope.

For those who haven't seen the film, it tells the story of a group of singers. But no ordinary singers. There is as in most stories, a battle between good and evil. Throughout history the evil , represented by demons, has tried to get into the world and steal people's souls. Yet, throughout history there has also been a group of singers, who have sung and united the world. The idea being that the music uplifts our souls, and when enough souls are uplifted, it forms a barrier of goodwill and protection around the world. ~In the film they call this barrier the *Honmoon*.

KPop Demon Hunters, a 2025 animated musical fantasy, introduced the world to a fictional K-pop girl-group: Huntr/X, voiced in song by Ejae, Audrey Nuna, and Rei Ami. Their anthem "Golden" which in the film is the second song sung, was released on 4 July 2025, and what followed was nothing short of astonishing. "Golden" soared to the top of global charts: it reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in the United States, topped the Billboard Global 200, and led various charts in more than thirty countries. The full soundtrack, for the first time for an animated film, placed not just one but multiple songs on the Hot 100, and the soundtrack album itself rose to the top of the Billboard 200. Over the summer, of the ten most popular songs in the world, four of them came from *K-Pop Demon Hunters*.

Songs like "Your Idol," "Soda Pop," "How It's Done," "What It Sounds Like," & "Free" carried the momentum alongside "Golden." /X, a fictional band born of a cartoon, had become very real in the hearts of millions, crossing borders, languages, and cultures.

At the heart of the a success of the song "Golden" is Kim Jung-Eun, known as Ejae. A songwriter and vocalist, she co-wrote the song and lent her voice to the lead character's singing. But Ejae's path was not smooth. She had been told she was "too old" to debut in the traditional K-pop industry, when she was only 24 years of age. But rather than giving up, she kept believing in what she could do. The very melody that became "Golden" in the cartoon was written on her way to the dentist, an incidental beginning that turned into a global anthem. Through Ejae's honesty, that refusal to be silenced by doubt, she created something that resonated across the world, in much the same way as the prophets of the Old Testament.

The story didn't end in the recording studio. Huntr/X's "Golden" was performed on major American stages: the trio sang at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York, turning

the streets into a sea of cheering and confetti. On New Years Eve, they have been invited to perform it in front of millions of views on American television. That Thganksgiving performance, which was broadcast to millions, marked a powerful moment: a fictional K-pop group becoming real in the eyes of the world, embraced by fans far beyond their imagined universe of the film. A few days later, three members of the real life K-Pop group Babymonster would sing Golden at the MAMA awards in Korea. Their performance went viral within two hours and shows the power of a sing and a message in this world.

Friends, as we know, Advent is a time of waiting. We wait for the coming of Christ who is the light in darkness. We have to wait with hope, longing, in patience. In that waiting there can be uncertainty, doubt, frustration. The days feel long, and the promise can seem distant. Waiting can be hard. But excellent things often come at the end of waiting. Birth. Redemption. Light. Joy. Just look at what happened with the song "Golden". What seemed at first like just a pop song from a cartoon grew, slowly but surely, into a global phenomenon which has reached millions and millions, and has brought joy to countless people of all ages. A voice once told Ejae she wasn't good enough. But through perseverance and faith in her gift, she and her collaborators created a masterpiece that spoke to millions. That journey mirrors the journey of Advent: waiting, believing, creating, trusting.

Waiting doesn't mean being idle. Ejae didn't just wait. She trained, wrote music, kept faith. In Advent, our waiting can be active: praying, prepare our hearts, and grow in love.

God uses the unlikely. Who would have predicted that an animated K-pop film would lead to global hit songs? Who would have foretold that the song "Golden" would become an anthem of triumph? But God's ways are not our ways, he delights in surprising us.

Sometimes failures and rejections can precede breakthroughs. They can be the doors, which at first seem like they are slammed shut are actually opening to greater things. Ejae being told she was "too old" in her early twenties. could have ended her dream. Instead, it became the fuel. God can turn our 'no' into 'yes' if we trust Him.

Joy, unity, and belonging can emerge from the most unexpected places. *K-Pop Demon Hunters* crossed borders, languages, cultures, and it brought people together. In Christ we are offered a belonging beyond our differences. As we walk these Advent days together, let us hold onto hope with an open heart. Whether you are waiting for healing, purpose, or direction. Whether we are lonely and are waiting for a sense of reconnection with others. Whether we are in turmoil and we are waiting for a sense of peace. Waiting is not a punishment, but a preparation. The Creator of time is faithful, and his promise is true.

And maybe, just maybe, what is emerging from your waiting can become a light for many. Amen.