



“Do not be afraid” LWF Christmas Message 2018

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11

Dearly beloved sisters and brothers,

May the grace and peace of the Christ of Christmas be multiplied upon you now and always. Amen.

Christmas—the season we celebrate the birth of our redeemer Jesus Christ—is here again!

Luke’s Gospel issues a radical admonition before the birth of Christ: “Do not be afraid”. Of course, words of comfort follow: “I bring you good news..”

Why did the angel begin with, “Do not be afraid”? Fear causes trauma, dissension, prejudice and exclusion of others. Fear impedes accommodation, hospitality and tolerance of the other. Fear triggers and sustains disbelief that may cause individuals or communities to miss good news. Fear has no doubt torn apart people and communities. Sadly, in some regions in my country, Nigeria, communities have polarized along ethnic and religious lines, all because of fear of the other.



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We must conquer our fear of others to truly experience the kind of serenity that can be transposed to the wider society. We cannot allow fear to interrupt our peaceful co-existence as human beings, especially in a world where geographical distances no longer separate us. Our hospitality towards those we consider strangers because they come from different religions, cultures or places can only be credible if we first dispel our fears.

The good news of Jesus Christ can only truly be received when fear is neutralized. The good news should inspire us to be more committed to the service of humanity. Therefore, if we become bearers of this good news, we must shed our fear of intervening in dangerous situations. We must not be afraid to challenge and confront forces, structures and systems that inhibit the realization of fullness of life for all human beings.

The celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2018 no doubt impels us to be bold in resisting and openly condemning acts that violate the rights and dignity of others.

Sisters and brothers, the angel addresses us today to not be afraid; to receive the good news with gratitude; and to go forth and be prophetic in our engagement with the world. The Christ of Christmas was never tolerant of injustice or violence. As followers of this same Christ, we should not compromise but instead be intentional in our actions for authentic justice, genuine peace, hospitable tolerance and life-giving *diakonia*.

Let me reiterate the words of the angel: "Do not be afraid ..."

Merry Christmas.



Archbishop Dr Panti Filibus Musa
President of The Lutheran World Federation

The Lutheran World Federation
Route de Ferney 150
PO Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland

www.lutheranworld.org
info@lutheranworld.org



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A nativity scene decorates
a wall outside a church
in Bogotá, Colombia.

Photo: courtesy of Albin Hillert