



# Unprecedented Christmas – Unexpected Joy

## LWF Christmas Message 2020

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. Luke 2:7*

Dear friends, sisters and brothers in Christ,

Once again, we gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus and to listen to the familiar verses telling of his birth in a stable in Bethlehem.

Yet as we prepare for Christmas this year, we are painfully aware of how unfamiliar this season will look for many of us, unable to gather with those we love, unable to worship in our churches or sing our traditional Christmas carols together face to face.

Since the start of 2020, all of us have been coping with the unfamiliar, unprecedented challenges brought by the Coronavirus pandemic. We have watched with fear and anxiety as the disease spread from one country to another, one continent to another, and most painfully, claiming hundreds of thousands of lives.



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We have had to adapt to the many dramatic changes imposed by quarantine restrictions, as governments and communities struggled to protect their people and to stop the spread of the virus.

Yet, we have often been encouraged by the many stories of solidarity and support offered by our churches to those worst affected by the lockdowns, those who've lost their source of income or who've found themselves isolated, lonely and in dire need at this time. We have been inspired by the stories of innovative ways in which churches have nurtured connections between people, to worship, serve, and witness to the gospel.

But for many of us, preparing to welcome Jesus into our homes and our hearts, this traditional season of joy and celebration may continue to be one of uncertainty and fear for the future.

As we read the familiar bible verses, though, we can imagine that Mary and Joseph must have had similar fears for themselves and the future of their child. Giving birth in a stable, far from their loved ones, surrounded by animals and a straw-filled manger for a crib was surely not what they had imagined for the birth of their child? As the gospel narratives unfold, we know that they, too, continued to experience fear and uncertainty as they fled into exile in Egypt.

And yet, we know that the birth of this child, laid in a manger and welcomed by humble shepherds, will bring new hope and new light to a dark world. Despite the unexpected, unplanned, messy circumstances of his birth, we know that this baby boy is the Messiah, the Son of God and Prince of Peace, who gives new life to all who believe in him.

Therefore, we too can trust in that promise, just as Mary and Joseph did. We can listen again to the story of God's coming into the world to bring light and life and hope amid all the difficulties we continue to encounter.

May you find new hope as you hear the familiar words of the gospel again and as you find new ways of worshipping and celebrating this year's Christmas, online or in person, as the circumstances allow.

May the light shine in the darkness of our lives and the lives of all people, as it did for the shepherds, surprised by the angels on that first Christmas night. And may the birth of the baby in Bethlehem, the newness of heaven, bring unexpected joy to you all and your families this Christmas season.

I wish you a happy and blessed Christmas!

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*Indigenous mother, Mariangel, with her child Atina, wearing a traditional costume from the region. They are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana which designed this Christmas card with The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Suriname.  
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