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LUTHERAN  
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## The Lutheran World Federation 2015 Christmas Message

From LWF President Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,  
Our member churches in the Lutheran communion,

I send greetings to each of you around the world from Jerusalem, the city of our Lord's ministry, death, and resurrection.

As we approach the Christmas season, many of us are filled with a greater awareness that our world is not safe and secure. The reality of violence and turmoil long present in the Middle East, parts of Africa, and southern Asia, has now manifested itself in Europe and North America. As the Holy Family once searched for a Bethlehem inn, I ask "is there a place in our world for peace based on justice? Is there a place in the inn?"

The beautiful image on the cover of this year's LWF Christmas card calls the Virgin Mary to my mind. The Christmas story begins with Caesar Augustus decreeing that all subjects should be registered. But the woman in this image has no place to register. She was forced to leave her home. She is a refugee who has been pushed out—for her faith, by violence, because she is different. In her, we see a person who could no longer find a place in her home country. But above all, we see, as with Mary, a loving mother who found a stable, a place of warmth and safety for her child.

When I see the faces of refugees, I see the face of Jesus in every one of them. I can hear the angels proclaiming glad tidings to the poor, proclaiming the world's need for the Prince of Peace even in this Christmas.

Such an image is very familiar to me. It goes to my heart because although I am a bishop, I am also a refugee. My family was forced to flee Beer Sheva in 1948. Had the church not embraced me through providing food and empowered me through education and evangelical spirituality, I would not be who I am today. Because we see in refugees the faces of Jesus and the Holy Family, our call for refugees today is strong: provide for their wellbeing, empower them for justice, strengthen them through education, welcome them into our countries, help them return to their homelands under a united, democratic political order, respecting human rights, gender justice, and freedom of religious expression.

If we do not do these things, we will live the experience of Matthew 25. There, Jesus says he has been hungry, a refugee, a prisoner—when did you feed and welcome me? Even as we realize that our political leaders and structures have not brought a solution to the refugee crisis, we recognize that the call of the church is always to serve the most vulnerable and to find for them a place in the inn. The message of Christmas challenges us to seek justice, to bring hope to the hopeless. It is up to us to help this woman to be reunited with others in her family. If we do not respond, will we simply see Herod force her to yet another place?

Our hope this Christmas is in the Prince of Peace, the one in whom God is glorified. Through the Holy Spirit, we are given authority to use our minds and bodies to bring peace among peoples, to bring healing and wholeness to refugees, to proclaim God's saving love to all. With these words I pray that all of you will experience a peaceful Christmas—inspired to work for peace not only for yourselves but for others who do not have peace.

I ask that you pray for the gift of justice in our world in all the places where it is missing. Is there a place in the inn for peace based on justice and reconciliation based on forgiveness?

Merry Christmas!  
Frohe Weihnachten!  
Joyeux Noël!  
Feliz Navidad!  
God Jul!  
Siunattua Joulua.  
Kol AAm Wa Antum Bikhair.

May God bless you all.

Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan  
President, The Lutheran World Federation

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Munib A. Younan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

*Photo: A displaced woman puts her child to sleep in a communal shelter in Northern Iraq. Baby Amara was born after her family fled persecution, and found refuge in a warehouse together with nine other families. LWF supports them with food, blankets, winter clothing and hygiene kits. Photo: LWF/Seivan Salim*