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## 2014 LWF Christmas Message

From LWF President Bishop Dr  
Munib A. Younan

*“But the angel said to them, ‘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)*



My dear sisters and brothers throughout our global Lutheran Communion,  
Greetings to you from Bethlehem, where our Lord Jesus was born, and from  
Jerusalem, the city of his resurrection.

Even as we celebrate this Christmas season, we are aware that there are many  
things happening in the world as though God was never incarnated in Christ in  
Bethlehem, as if God is absent from this world. Even as some of us visit the  
Christmas markets and attend the parties and church services, we know that  
many other people living in our global family are asking “Where is God today?”

These questions are understandable. The world is again filled with conflicts, filled with violations of human rights, filled with limits on religious freedom, oppression, injustice, gender injustice, and occupation. Extremism is developing in many places. Girls are kidnapped from safe schools, just because they were seeking education for themselves and their families. We can ask: Is God absent from this world or are we, as human beings, absencing God from our lives?

The message of Christmas, encountered in the midst of these questions and struggles, is that even if we feel that God is far away from us, even if we feel that God no longer has a place in our world, God is present here with us. God has been made flesh, incarnated in Bethlehem. The Good News rings forth through the centuries: A Child is born! Do not be afraid.

We see signs of this hope every day. When I heard that Malala Yousafzai had been selected to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, I felt a sense that God was still working in this world. A survivor of violent hatred, her adversity has made her into a tireless promoter of education and gender justice, a combination many parts of the world badly need today.

The Good News proclaimed by the angels to the shepherds in the fields centuries ago still rings true: God is with us today. Jesus' manger today is with refugees, from Iraq or Syria or in Dadaab, Kenya, after fleeing violence and food insecurity in the Horn of Africa. God is with vulnerable people wherever extremism is growing. Christ's manger is with the persecuted people in Nigeria, or those who are suffering under blasphemy laws in Pakistan and elsewhere. Christ's manger is present with the landless movement in Brasil and all who are afflicted by disparities of wealth.

Although the poor and oppressed can feel abandoned, God is born among them. God is born there, where many Christians in the world are persecuted for their faith alone. God is born in every person trying to swim against the tide of any political or religious extremism, people who know that accepting the Other is the only way to peace and reconciliation. Soon after his birth, Jesus became a political refugee as he fled to Egypt with the Holy Family. In Christ, God has endured our pain. As Emmanuel, God is in us and with us and will continue to be with us.

The challenge for Lutheran Christians today is to prepare our hearts so Christ can reside in us in our broken, globalized world. We are called to prepare our villages and cities as his straw manger, welcoming him as we welcome the stranger, the migrant, and the refugee. When the church rejects silence through embracing the call to prophetic diakonia and the practices of justice, we prepare for the birth of Christ.

At Christmas, we must not concentrate only on the problems we face in this world. We must instead concentrate on how God continues to be incarnate even in the midst of all the problems we face. When we find Jesus as Emmanuel, God's perfect love casts out our fear as it happened with the shepherds on the first Christmas. With the love of God in Christ Jesus, our world will become one of equality, a world of accepting the Other, a world where the humanity adopted by God in the incarnation is fully respected in every person. Because God has

become one of us, we are called to be one with each other, living fully in the freedom, liberation, justice, peace, and reconciliation.

These benefits of God are made available to us as a free gift in the person of Jesus Christ, the babe born in a Bethlehem manger. I pray that each of you will find joy in the person of Jesus and the presence of God this Christmas season so you are strengthened and encouraged to serve your neighbors, near and far.

May God bless you.

Merry Christmas!

Fröhliche Weihnachten!

Joyeux Noël!

Feliz Navidad!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a plus sign followed by the lowercase letters 'ila.y' and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.