



## Hope born in a manger LWF Christmas Message

*Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

I bring you greetings of joy and peace, rooted in hope, the traditional gifts that we wish for each other in this blessed Christmas season.

Yet how difficult it is to experience joy and peace in these uncertain times, as new variants of the Coronavirus continue to cast shadows over our longed-for festive celebrations. How hard it is to be joyful when jobs may be on the



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line and livelihoods threatened. How hard it is to find peace in our hearts when we are confronted by violence and destruction, when our minds are filled with anxiety about what the future holds!

For many, the restrictions of the past year have limited physical contacts with colleagues, families, and friends. They have forced us to reconsider our priorities and to rethink our working lives. For some, the limitations have taught us to be kinder, less self-centered and a little more attentive to our neighbors in need. They have forced us to slow down, to rediscover the people and places around us and to find more time for prayer, meditation, or more sustainable ways of living.

For others, the consequences of the pandemic have caused unprecedented hardship and pain. The number of men, women and especially young people struggling with mental health problems is at a record high. Cases of domestic violence and femicide have risen in most countries as women and girls were locked down at home with abusive family members and life-saving shelters were forced to close their doors.

Reading Paul's words to the first Christians in Rome, we remember that they too were living in challenging times. The Apostle reminds them that God is the source of all hope and that their calling is simply to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform their lives from within.

As we continue to work towards the next LWF Assembly in Poland in 2023, focused on the theme of 'One Body, One Spirit, One Hope,' we too will be exploring ways in which the Holy Spirit creates, reconciles, and renews us today amid all the difficulties we face.

As we conclude our Advent vigil and gather around the manger to witness the birth of a baby in Bethlehem, we are reminded that this child laying in a manger is also the God of hope and the Prince of peace. As we wish each other a joyful Christmas, let us trust anew in the power of the Creator who came down to earth to share our human experiences. Joining with the angels in praying for peace on earth, let us redouble our own efforts to bring reconciliation, dignity, and hope for all people in our world today. May you be filled with the joy and peace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Merry Christmas!

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*Young Christian artist Seint Sanhtay, illustrates God's assurance of the Holy Spirit's power to inspire Christ-anchored hope, that can bring joy and peace in Myanmar and globally. LWF's 2021 Christmas card comes from Myanmar, in collaboration with The Federation of Lutheran Churches in Myanmar.*