Newsletter special edition December 2020

The Coordinating Committee wishes…

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people (Titus 2, 11)

We are surrounded by uncertainty, anxiety and fear. Unprepared for the new situation, we try to capture some information or any hint that a better time is coming. And there is none. But it seems to me that our fears and anxieties do not find the cause in the fact that there is no visible and definite improvement in the condition, but in the fact that we somehow lose the ability for true and sincere hope. It seems that we had given up. We spend time looking for a solution to be announced through the media, the internet and in conversation with friends. We have lost faith that reality, whatever it is at the moment, is good and favorable to us in its origin.

Seeking hope and talking about it actually means talking about Christmas. Christmas is our original hope and faith in the victory of life and good, no matter how small it may seem. Christmas hope is born precisely from impotence, but impotence that enables us to believe. Then when we reach the limits of our powers, then when it seems to us that we have given and done everything we could, then when we dive into that mystery, a new view of the reality around us opens up to us and new possibilities are revealed. As paradoxical as it may sound, but the basis of hope is the awareness of hopelessness. It is an impulse that throws us into a new reality - the reality of hope, which begins where knowledge stops and where we face the end of our possibilities.

Based on helplessness, as a small child in a nursery, if we believe her, accept her and nurture her, we will discover another dimension of the world and reality. Christmas hope is just that - strength in weakness!

"Don't be afraid! Behold, I bring you good tidings, great joy for all the people. Today in the city of David your Savior, Christ, the Lord, has been born. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:10). Therefore, it is actually justified to look at hope not only as an expression and a way out of our helplessness and misery, but also as a revelation of a depth grounded in eternity. But not the eternity we are waiting for in the future, but the eternity in time here and now. Hope is when we hope and believe in Someone. That is why hope is always born again and that is why it is connected with prayer. We can only pray to a person. That grace of the new birth, that trust in the strength that is born from helplessness, is actually the culmination of our hope, and that is Christmas.

If we just stand aside, helpless, scared, anxious, and as children listen to some fairy tales, and Christmas stories are like that, we will not deserve that gift of hope. Hope is gift given to those who, even in helplessness are not disinterested observers or critics of the situation, but to those who in the darkness of their hopelessness glimpse and listen to the voice of hope – those voices that had told shepherds in the night that God had become man. Therefore, let's put our trust in God's hands, because Christmas just allows us that.

Marijana Ajzenkol

"A little child, a shining star, a stable rude, the door ajar.

Yet in that place, so crude, forlorn, the Hope of all the world was born."

Christmas greetings to all our forum sisters, and peaceful wishes for 2021.

Fiona Buchanan

Merciful God

Fill everything with your Christmas peace
and blessing.
Help everyone to grow in faith and hope,
love and fidelity,
Honesty, dignity and humanity.

May this joy in us in the encounter with You
constantly grow
and that we may tell everyone about You,
about Christmas, about our growing sisterly love.
May the true love and joy of Christmas
accompany us all constantly!

Amen!

Marijana Ajzenkol

Christmas is here! It means inclusion, respect, solidarity, compassion and of course Hope. Hope is many things, we look forward with Hope, Hope carries us, Hope inspires us, and we carry the Hope. Hope is a question of expressing the nerve of being a human being. Often is says that we can long for or that we can see the light in the end of the tunnel. But for me, all what we are doing, and women are doing in all local contexts, are lights in the tunnel. Every day's struggle means carrying the Hope for the humanity.

Carin Gardbring

Dear sisters, friends, members of the Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women!

During these days we could hear many times how important it is to make sure that Christmas celebrations can take place, somehow to "save" Christmas in Covid-times? But isn't it just the other way round, that the holy night of Bethlehem, that Christmas saves us?

So let's share the blessing of our Saviour among us and with our sisters and brothers in #Lesbos, #Moria, #Kara Tepe, #Nagorni Karabach, #Belarus, #Ukraine, at the borders of #Bosnia and at all places where human rights are disobeyed. Yours sincerely,

Gabi Kienesberger, Austria

« Et le Verbe s'est fait chair et il a habité parmi nous » Jn 1,14

Au cœur de notre humanité, au coeur de notre vie quotidienne, comme pour les Bergers, Dieu est venu frapper à notre porte pour nous appeler à l'Espérance.

Chères sœurs du Forum, gardez la saveur de cette rencontre intime pour que chante en vous cette Espérance,

Que, sur vos chemins escarpés, l'Enfant Dieu manifeste sa tendresse,

Que l'Emmanuel vous remplisse de sa grâce,

Que le Gloria des anges résonne dans vos cœurs.

Dans la joie de notre fraternité sans frontières, je vous souhaite à vous et à vos familles, un joyeux Noël.

Anne-Marie Schott

Nativité of Géraldine Mirey

(avec l'aimable autorisation de l'artiste)

"And the Word became flesh and dwelled among us" Jn 1,14

At the heart of our humanity, at the heart of our daily life, God came knocking on our door to call us to Hope, like he did with the shepherds.

Dear sisters of the Forum, keep the flavor of this intimate encounter, so that Hope can sing in you,

May The Child God manifest his tenderness on your steep paths,

May Emmanuel fill you with his grace,

May the angels' Gloria resonate in your hearts.

In the joy of our sisterhood without borders, I wish you and your families a Merry Christmas.

Anne-Marie Schott

This year, many gatherings couldn't take place, and we were never able to meet in crowds. So with the children of the French Reformed Church of Basel we painted a crowd instead. Crowds surrounded Jesus from his birth and throughout his ministry until his death on the cross. This year, we can only form a crowd in Spirit – thinking of all those whom we couldn't meet due to the pandemic, keeping in our hearts all our loved ones, all those whom we miss, all those who departed from us. Through the Holy Spirit we are united across the distance of time and space. With our churches, with our sisters in Europe and the world, we can join in these days the crowd of shepherds and magi around the baby in Bethlehem.

Merry Christmas to you all!

Evelyne Zinsstag

Europe celebrates Christmas on 25th December, and we Armenians join to this great feast of Christian Church. The Armenian Apostolic Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Nativity and Theophany of Our Lord Jesus Christ on January 6, which is the commemoration of the Birth and Baptism of Jesus Christ. God was incarnated and appeared to the people.

The feast starts on the eve, in the evening of January 5, and is continued after midnight. On the eve a solemn Candlelight Divine Liturgy is celebrated. On January 6 a solemn Divine Liturgy is celebrated. At the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy Blessing of the Waters Service is conducted symbolizing the Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan at the commencement of His ministry. By means of His Baptism Jesus blessed water. Celebrant priest pours out the Holy Chrism drop by drop into water and blesses the water. According to the tradition people take some blessed water with them to use it as a medicinal remedy for the sick. After Blessing of the Waters Service the priests visit the houses of the faithful to proclaim the Christmastide Good News of the Birth of Jesus Christ and hence the tradition of Blessing of the Houses was formed.

Dear sisters, regardless of when we celebrate Holy Nativity of our Lord, let join to laudation of angels and say: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Lk 2:14).

Marianna Apresyan

Warmest Christmas greetings from Ukraine: Unfortunately our country has already been for 6 years now in the terrible devastating war… So our prayers in this holy time are again for healing and peace: in our hearts and souls, in all our families and countries, in Europe and in the whole world!

Ukrainian children in traditional clothes singing Christmas carols in Lviv center near the city's biggest «didukh». They are our future! And they desperately need peace! "Didukh" literally means "the spirit of ancestors". It's a traditional Ukrainian Christmas decoration made from a sheaf of wheat, a symbolic sacrifice taken from the autumn harvest. It symbolises the household's wish for an abundance of nature and a bountiful harvest for the upcoming year. It is believed that the spirits of the household's ancestors reside in didukh during the holidays.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" *(John 14:27)*

Almighty God, you are the only source of health and healing.
In you there is calm, and the only true peace in the universe.
Grant to each one of us your children an awareness of your presence, and give us perfect confidence in you.
In all pain and weariness and anxiety teach us to yield ourselves to your never-failing care, knowing that your love and power surround us, trusting in your wisdom and providence to give us health and strength and peace when your time is best;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen. (***The Nazarene, Vols. 7-9, 1922***)

Photo: Carolers with stars present traditional Christmas play (vertep) near the most beautiful cathedral in Lviv - the Dominican church, which survived in Soviet times only because it was a museum of atheism. «Soli Deo honor et gloria» - an inscription under the dome of the church – can symbolically mean that with the God's help Ukrainians can now have it's own free country with the authentic religion, traditions and languages. During Soviet times carolers with their whole families were often sent to Siberia or even shot.

Natalia Horbal