

FOR PEACE



CHRISTMAS 2025



BELOVED PERSON,

Silent night, holy night ... Outside, the evening is coming quickly, and it is becoming dark. It is precisely then, that it is good to know that there are places where light is shining and you are welcome, where people sing about their longing to bring love and hope everywhere. Particularly now!

Each year, Christmas tells us the story of a child that came into our world in all simplicity. He showed us how every person can become a light of love, even when life seems dark and, like today, there are so many places where peace seems so far away. How, then, can you keep the softness in your heart? How can we encourage each other in the belief that peace on earth also begins in ourselves?

The words, songs, and drawings in this booklet are about these questions. See them as a string of lights. Together, they guide us along a path to peace, connection, and hope. Feel more than welcome to experience this yourself and to make your own contribution to it.

Marten van der Wal and Nanda Ziere
Lead pastors for the Apostolic Society

SILENT NIGHT

Silent is the night. Beautifully soft,
the splendour of the stars shines from afar.
People come, people go.
Through their fleeting, transient existence.
Eternal power breathes.
The night is wonderfully silent.

The night is silent. Everyone waits
for the light, for the power,
that dispels the darkness
and makes everything grow,
that reconciles and softens.
The night is wonderfully quiet.

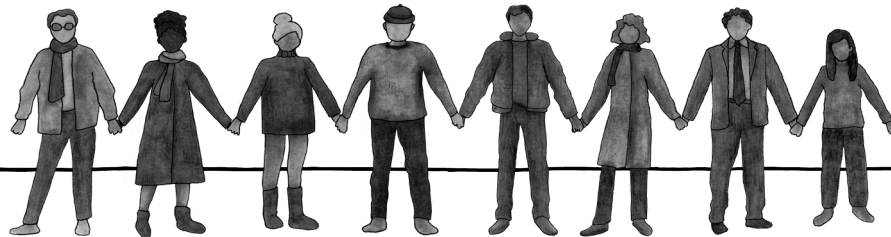
Look around you. People gathered together
sing softly: Silent Night.
What is unspeakable, what you cannot see,
is hidden in this divine song.
Follow the voice of your heart.
Sing through the black of night.

On this night, the stars shone brightly in the heavens.
In the stable, there shone a light. A newborn child
lay in a manger, a boy, wrapped in swaddling clothes.
Curious, the animals came to catch his scent. Wise
men brought presents, and shepherds peeked around
the corner Together, they were all very welcome.

And on this Christmas evening, you are also welcome.
We are all welcome here together, whether it's your
first time here or you are a regular attendee. Whether
you last were here just yesterday or a long time ago.
Whether you are sitting here with heavy thoughts or in

light spirits and in a good mood, you are all welcome.
Together, we are approaching Christmas, the celebration
of peace and the movement towards the light.

Perhaps you wish to calm your spirit and experience a
moment of reflection, feeling that you are together with
other people of good will. Pause for a minute, and allow
your thoughts to wander wherever they will. Where am
I? What is going on around me? What moves me? How
can I keep the softness in my heart? Christmas can be a
moment for everyone to search for peace.





HOW CAN I KEEP THE SOFTNESS IN MY HEART?

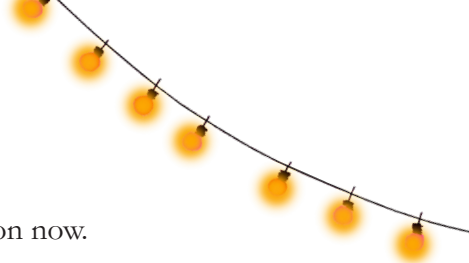
WHEN A CHILD IS BORN

A ray of hope flickers in the sky.
A tiny star lights up way up high.
All across the land dawns a brand new morn'.
This comes to pass when a Child is born.

A silent wish sails the seven seas.
The winds of change whisper in the trees.
And the walls of doubt crumble, tossed and torn.
This comes to pass when a Child is born.

A rosy hue settles all around.
You've got the feel you're on solid ground.
For a spell or two, no one seems forlorn.
This comes to pass when a Child is born.

It's all a dream an illusion now.
It must come true sometime soon, somehow.
All across the land dawns a brand new morn'.
This comes to pass when a Child is born.







For many people around the world, Christmas is the celebration of peace and light in dark times, with the image of the child in the manger as a symbol of hope. But the images we see on a daily basis are far from hopeful: people fleeing their homes, for whom safety and security are a far-off dream, young men fighting in the trenches in Ukraine and Russia, mothers in Gaza with their arms raised to the heavens in despair. It is enough to make you lose hope. So, what remains of the Christmas spirit, of 'peace on earth and goodwill to all'? It's a question that can evoke turmoil in your feelings and thoughts. But it can also make you feel that you want to, and must do, something. Stand up, take a first step, and advocate for peace.

Perhaps that is also what happened on those Sundays this year, when people said, 'I've never been to a demonstration, but now I'm going'. Red trousers were taken out of the closet, and red jumpers were borrowed. The streets of the Hague coloured red during those days. The atmosphere was friendly and united, and in-depth conversations sprang up quickly. Everyone had the same goal, forming a red line to show that they rejected violence. Were they for or against a particular party? They were simply standing for human dignity and peace. They wanted to do something and were speaking out. Because peace on earth starts with yourself, and peace can only begin with my own first step. And then I ask myself, 'How have I shown my desire for peace this year?'

PROSPECT FOR PEACE

The longing for a world in peace,
for balance and for harmony,
is in the depths of our existence,
finds voice to counter anarchy.

It's revealed in people's eyes
in which I see their desperate plights,
but also hope, belief and love
as counterweight for pain and fright.

They emanate from having faith
in God, the most creative force,
which of all things, of every people
and their culture, is the source.

At core they all are just the same,
despite origin, despite beliefs.
Whoever knows that, will help building
the house of peace, piece by piece.



Are you for or against? Far away and nearby, the world seems to be ever hardening, and the differences between people only seem to be growing. Which side should you stand on, or does it make any sense to pick sides at all, and why? Cracks can suddenly appear in old friendships and even in families, sometimes with heated discussions.

In the stable, totally different worlds also came together: a group of rough shepherds, wise men from another country, a practical carpenter, and a woman in labour. Differences add variety but can of course also be confrontational. After all, other people can really be quite different than yourself, and how do you deal with that?

Actor Jacob Derwig explained in a podcast that he had learnt to always look for something attractive in the other person, for example if you have to act in a love

scene with someone whom you would never choose yourself. He added, ‘You will always find that something!’ If you try a little harder, you can always discover something special in the other person. You can always find common ground to focus on. Instead of looking for the differences and perhaps even magnifying them, you simply keep searching in the other person until you find something that your heart recognises.¹

How you look also makes a difference. As a nurse once experienced: ‘I had a colleague who always seemed to get on my nerves. Even before we put on our white uniforms, I felt an almost allergic reaction. Until one evening, I thought to myself that I would do it differently this time and look at her differently. This nightshift I will think loving thoughts about her. And believe it or not, the shift turned out very differently’.

POEM

Because you were
where you were

and I am now
where I now am

I will never fully be able
to be where you were

and you will never be able
to be where I am now

But we can tell each other the story
and that will be enough²











Where do I meet the other who is so different?
And what could I wish for him or her?

It sometimes requires courage to take a different perspective and let go of our convictions. By looking at others with a soft gaze and reflecting on the wonder of my existence and your existence, and the existence of the other, I can create space for change. In the Apostolic Society, at Christmas we celebrate the birth of a new and loving attitude. In his life, Jesus made a radical and courageous choice for humanity and for love – even though it was no easy choice. That loving approach still inspires us to this very day. We believe that every person (you and you and certainly me) can be or again become a loving person. That is how we see ourselves and each other, regardless of how different we all may be.

You can always choose once again to become a loving person. This is something wonderful but also something that requires courage. Perhaps you remember that moment, during the prayer service for the inauguration of the new United States President. Before the eyes of the entire world, Bishop Mariann Budde asks for compassion. 'Let me make one final plea, Mr President. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are afraid now'.

And over the whole world, people saw how she made a plea for compassion for people – for immigrants

without residence permits, for gay and transgender people. Dare to be courageous is her most important message to us. Because courage, she says, is not something you are born with but a conscious choice, which you make every day again and again. Courage is something you can practice, whether it means that you express your opinion, define your borders, or swim against the current of opinion. Real courage is often revealed in the small day-to-day decisions we all make.³



Perhaps I also need courage myself, courage to remain true to who I am and who I wish to be. To remain true to my own values, while people around me think quite differently. I wish to speak out, while others remain silent. I wish to have the courage to begin anew and be a loving person. Do you recognise this feeling?



COURAGE IS A CONSCIOUS CHOICE THAT YOU MAKE
EVERY DAY AGAIN AND AGAIN.

NEARER TO YOU, MY SOUL, CLOSE TO MINE

Nearer to you, my soul, close to mine.

Source where I find my origin, that is where I want to be.

There my heart sings a song; love gives me strength.

Nearer to you, my soul, close to mine.

Dreams, wonder, a gift so pure,

It glows like dawn in my deepest being.

There I feel balance, it gives me clear vision.

Nearer to you, my soul, close to mine.

Nearer to you my soul, close to mine.

Source where I find my origin, that is where I want to be.

She who determines my course, translates selfishness into loyalty.

Nearer to you, my soul, close to mine.



This song is about gentleness. I need courage to be gentle. I need courage to remain open in my contact with the other.

If I am gentle, then I have faith in solidarity and connection. I am curious rather than liable to form a quick opinion. I try to focus less on hard forces, be less angry, be less aggressive, and focus less on the differences. Instead, I look for gentle forces: where and when can I be mild, collaborate, and look for connection? Where can I build bridges instead of walls? Because I feel in all my being that the connecting power of gentleness will last the longest.

If we are gentle, we shoulder responsibility ourselves. We don't shout from the sidelines that they have to do it but ask ourselves the sensitive question: 'What can we do? What can I do?' We look in the mirror instead of pointing the finger at others. Perhaps that is what Christmas invites us to do again each year, to allow the rebirth of gentleness in me and in all of us.

IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR (INSTRUMENTAL)

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
“Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven’s all-gracious King.”
The world in solemn stillness lay,
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o’er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains,
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o’er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

And ye, beneath life’s crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
and hear the angels sing!

For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophet seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.





CAN WE LOOK AT OTHERS AND OURSELVES
WITH NEW EYES?

Can we look at others and ourselves with new eyes?
Because peace can start with us. If you can see peace
as something that is not the responsibility of others
but which depends on us, a new perspective unfolds.
Then peace becomes an awareness and a choice to
do what you, at this moment, can do using whatever
has been given to you. It becomes a choice to listen,
to stay, to embrace each other, even when, or perhaps
precisely when, it is more difficult than ever. A choice
to stand tall, time and again, a choice for peace in
your own square metre, wherever you are and with
whoever you are face to face with at that moment.
Then, something new can arise.



WHERE PEOPLE BEGIN TO FEEL

Where people begin to feel
their deepest intentions
and start afresh, as new
there you will find heaven on earth, thus bringing peace among us

Where people start giving themselves,
let love beckon
and start anew, as new
there you will find heaven on earth, thus peace will come among us

Where people connect
overcome hatred
and start anew, as new
there you will find heaven on earth, thus peace will come among us

The power of kindness and peace starts with yourself but extends further – to other people, to the community, and to the future. It is a way of life whereby you have the courage to believe that you make a difference, and that your words and dedication make a difference.

Then you have the courage to believe in heaven on earth. Then we are truly alive, not only in our own story, but also by contributing to the story of the other person. And we contribute to the ‘bigger story of love’ that can be realised by people, over and over again.



Choose for peace,
let it become lighter where it is dark.
May gentleness be your strength,
and hope your compass.

We can choose to let love grow.
It starts with you and with us,
precisely where we are: here and now.

May peace be born within us.
Then something new begins
and light breaks through
with you.

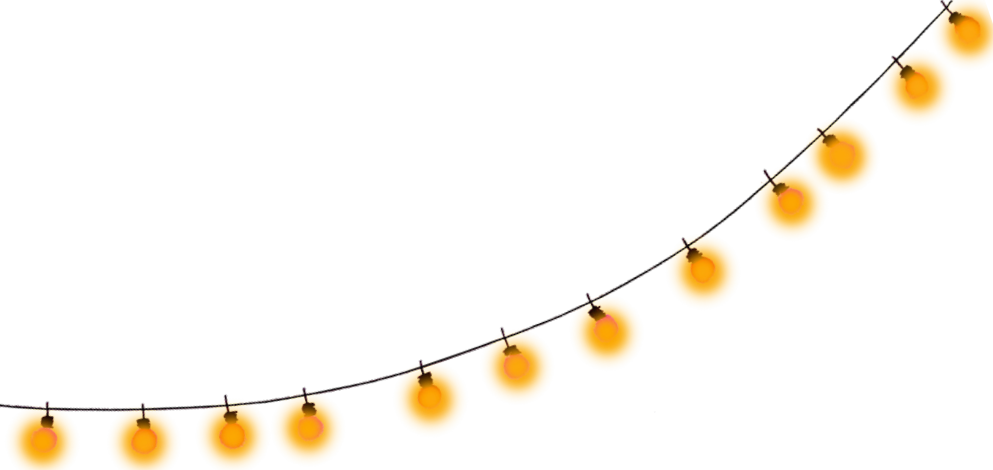
LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH

Let there be peace on earth
and let it begin with me;
Let there be peace on earth,
the peace that was meant to be.
With God source of all,
we are family.
Let us walk with each other
in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me,
let this be the moment now.
With ev'ry step I take,
let this be my solemn vow;
To take each moment,
and live each moment
in peace eternally.

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.





References

- ¹ From: Nanda Ziere, weekly letter no. 18, 2025
- ² Awraham Soetendorp, *Levenslessen van een rabbijn*, p.155.
- ³ Bishop Marian Budde in *De Verwondering*, KRO/NCRV, 19 April 2025.
- ⁴ Inspired by Sara Kroos in *De Verwondering*, KRO/NCRV, 15 December 2024.
- ⁵ Inspired by Marten van der Wal, weekly letter no. 1, 2025.



Colophon

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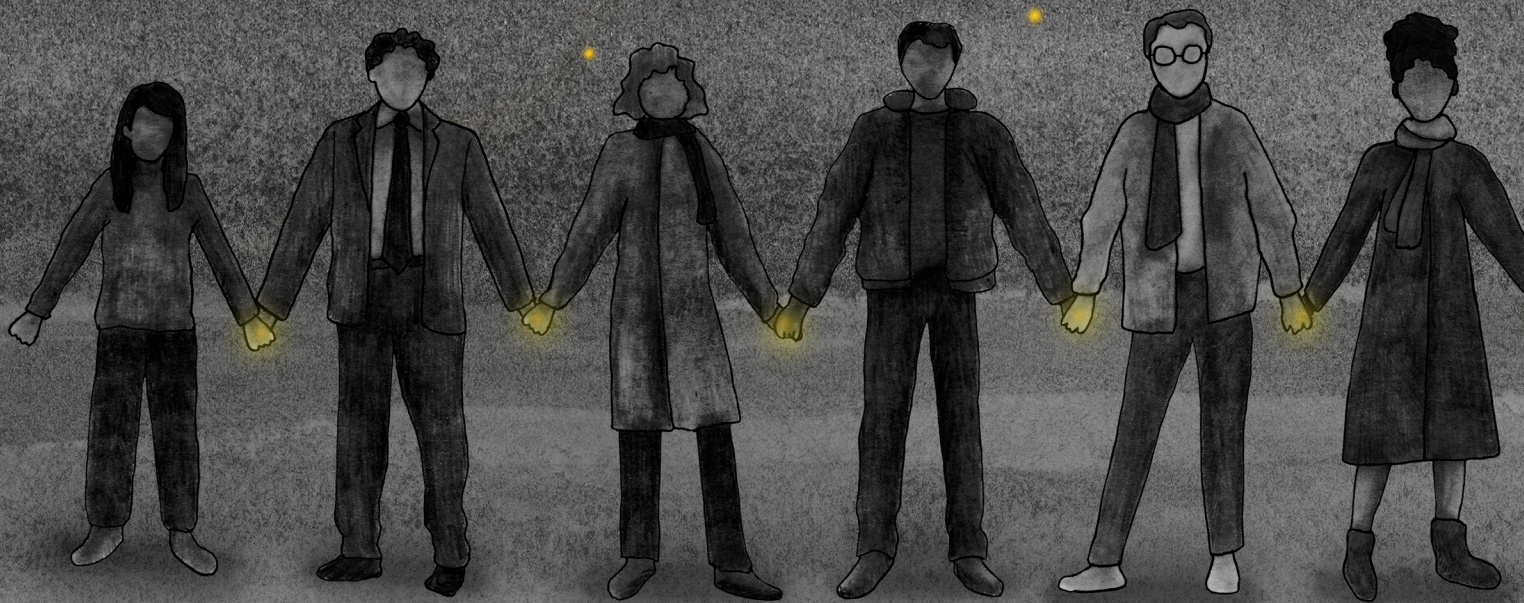
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