



**Christmas message
by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
in Schloss Bellevue
on 25 December 2017**

Fellow citizens,

Many parts of our country are unusually quiet this evening. The calm that settles in across Germany at Christmastime, when stores close, traffic dwindles and children, parents and grandparents have been picked up from the train station, is a calm we wish we also had on other days.

It's a moment's escape from the rest of the year's hectic pace. A time between Christmas and New Year's Eve when we can take pause.

For the Christians among us, this calm is symbolic of the Christmas story's promise of peace. I hope that you, that all of us, will be able to experience this moment – a Christmas moment that we can remember and cherish all year long.

Of course, I know that, to enjoy calm, it must come as respite from the hustle and bustle of daily life. We only find it comforting if we've searched for it – because it's something we don't normally find in our everyday lives.

Over the last year, I've travelled a great deal all over our beautiful country, and I've visited places that wish they were anything but calm. These are towns that saw their last gas station or supermarket close a long time ago, in which even the local restaurant has shut down. Where people need to travel farther and farther to get to the next doctor, and where buses no longer run. There are far too many such places, both in the east and the west of our country. Having visited them, I know that calm also can be fraught with danger. That's because, for those who've stayed, life has gotten tough. I can understand that people there are dissatisfied, that they even feel left behind.

But I've also met people who are not letting their towns become abandoned. People who are bringing life back to these calm places. I think of a small town in Saxony in particular – there are lots like it across our country. For many, especially the younger ones, life had grown far too quiet. These people are working to save their town, making sure it's a place worth living in – maybe even a place worth returning to. The town's citizens, and its mayor, made a deep impression on me.

Of course, people there, too, cannot perform miracles. Money's in short supply, like it is in many other places. But this hasn't stopped them. That's why the downtown now again boasts a cafe run by volunteers where people can meet, a small cinema that grew out of a grassroots initiative, a playground built by neighbours, and houses that the community is looking after and protecting, even fixing up so that young families can move in.

The kinds of people I've met in Saxony and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, or in Bavaria and Lower Saxony, are truly inspiring – and they deserve our encouragement. More than that, they deserve the support of politicians.

These local examples take on a special significance as we step back to see the big picture. They show us that we're not in a helpless situation. Our future is not set in stone! We can overcome the sense of powerlessness and alienation, on both a large and small scale, if we take action as a community. If we stop calling on others to be responsible and start to realise that responsibility begins with us. By assuming responsibility, also for others, like millions of volunteers across Germany do, we can feel truly at home in this country. I am most grateful for what all of them are doing.

I am speaking of this because I'm convinced we have cause for optimism. Over the past decades, we have time and again overcome crises and reinvented ourselves. We have remained a country with policies that are guided by the principles of economic reason and social justice. And we are a country that has the strength and willpower to maintain our cohesion and bring us closer together. In both these endeavours, there's still lots of work to be done.

Some 30 years ago, the Christmas season was characterised by incredible awe and enthusiasm thanks to the fall of the Wall. Although it was an unforgettable moment for all of us, it also marked the beginning of uncertainty for many. But, looking back, don't we see how much it paid off to celebrate that unique moment without fear? The fall of the Wall was not a Christmas miracle; it was the accomplishment of brave people!

Since that time, the world around us has been changing. We live in times when we're constantly confronted with the unexpected. These

are also disconcerting times. We yearn for continuity, and we yearn for certainty. But if we didn't have it in us to bravely and openly confront the unexpected, then the shepherds of Bethlehem would have given up long before completing their search.

Not all things that are unexpected should inspire fear. This also applies when the formation of a new government takes longer than foreseen. I can assure you that the state is functioning in accordance with the rules that have been set out in our Basic Law specifically for a situation like this, even though in recent decades these didn't need to be applied. So we have every reason to be confident.

Fellow citizens,

I want to say a special word of thanks today to all those who are looking after others, after those who are alone and without the comfort of a family. To nurses, police officers and soldiers, to all those who are now on duty where they're needed.

Fellow citizens,

I wish you all a blessed Christmas. My greetings this Christmas also go out to those in our country who did not grow up in the Christian tradition, to those who have a different faith, or who may have no religion at all. To all those who at this festive moment are here in our country. Let's look out for one another!

My wife and I wish you a peaceful and merry Christmas.