



**Christmas address
by Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
at Schloss Bellevue
on 25 December 2021**

My fellow Germans, my wife and I send our warmest greetings to you all this Christmas. Whether you will be spending these days alone or with family, in a festive apartment or on night shift, in the room of a nursing home, as a nurse or doctor on the ward, or on duty at the police or fire station – wherever you happen to be: we wish all of you a happy and blessed Christmas!

When we look back on the past year, we see much that worries us, much, too, that made us fearful. We remember the catastrophic floods in the summer. We remember our soldiers who returned home from Afghanistan, and also the people who have remained there amid suffering and starvation. We are concerned by the news we hear from many regions of our turbulent world, also and particularly from Eastern Europe.

And yet this past year also saw much which gives us hope. I am thinking of the tremendous solidarity with the flood victims, of the donations and especially of the huge practical assistance. I am thinking of the many young and not so young people who are committed to protecting the environment and mitigating climate change. And I am thinking of all of you who voted in important elections, and of the democratic handover of power in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Many people are now watching with curiosity and with hope a new Federal Government that has set itself ambitious goals in the service of our country.

Above all, however, I am thinking of the commitment shown by volunteers in all corners of our society. So much is done in the background, day in, day out; so many people are rolling up their sleeves and helping as a matter of course. Day by day they all weave the network which makes up the positive fabric of our society and holds it together.

Yes, and then there is COVID-19. Soon, it will be two years since the pandemic began to dominate our lives – here and across the world. Rarely have we felt so directly the vulnerability of our human life and the unpredictability of the future – the next month, the next week, indeed even the next day. Just now, once again, we face greater restrictions in order to protect ourselves against a new variant of the virus.

Yet we have also learned that we are not powerless. We can protect ourselves and others. I am glad that the vast majority have recognised the potential that the vaccination holds. How much great suffering, how many deaths has it prevented up to this point!

Seldom has our state had such a responsibility to protect its people's health and lives. To do justice to this responsibility it needs the expert scientists, the doctors and nurses, responsible law enforcement officers and employees in the public authorities. They are all doing their best. And they are all gaining new knowledge, correcting assumptions that have proven false, and adapting measures. People can make mistakes, but they also learn.

So the state has an obligation and must act, but not only the state. The state cannot put on protective masks in our place, nor can it get the vaccination on our behalf. No, it is up to each and every one of us to do our part!

I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart the vast, often silent, majority in our country who have been acting cautiously and responsibly for months now. Because they have realised that more than ever before, we are dependent on each other – I on others, and others on me.

Of course there are disputes here. Of course there are uncertainties and fears, and it is important to address them. In our country no one is prevented from doing so. The crucial thing is how we talk about these issues – in our families, with our friends, in public. We sense that after two years frustration is growing; irritability is widespread; we are increasingly seeing alienation and, regrettably, open aggression. It is true that in a democracy we do not all have to be of the same opinion. But I appeal to you to remember this: we are one country. When the pandemic is over, we need still to be able to look one another in the eye. And when the pandemic is over, we still want to live with each other.

The pandemic is not going to come to a sudden end. It will keep us occupied for a long time yet. And it is already changing us, even leaving its mark on our day-to-day language. Not only have we had to become familiar with new terms – like "incidence" or "2G+". No, our precious old words, too, are taking on an urgent new quality.

What is the meaning of trust, for example? Not blind trust, obviously. But could it perhaps mean also relying on competent advice, even if my own doubts have not been entirely dispelled?

What is the meaning of freedom? Is freedom a loud protestation against each and every regulation? Or does it not sometimes also mean that I place restrictions on myself in order to safeguard the freedom of others?

What is the meaning of responsibility? Do we simply say: "That is something people have to decide for themselves"? Is it not true to say that my decision in fact affects many other people as well?

Freedom, trust, responsibility: what they mean is something on which we will have to reach agreement – again in the future too, and also on other major issues such as climate change mitigation. Here, too, there will be no one single correct answer that persuades everyone. Rather, we will have to reach agreement anew, again and again. And I am certain that we can reach agreement. After all, we have already proven often that we can do so.

My fellow Germans, it was at Christmas more than 50 years ago that people first orbited the moon. The older ones among us may perhaps remember the images: up there in space, at that moment of the greatest human advance, our small, vulnerable Earth was visible as never before. That was where all the progress had begun, and it is here that we all live, with our burdens and hopes, with our sorrow and with our joy.

On that occasion, the three Apollo 8 astronauts read out the beginning of the Biblical story of creation – and they concluded their Christmas message with the words "God bless all of you on the good Earth."

My fellow Germans, that is the wish my wife and I have for you and for us: that it will continue to be the good Earth for all of us, that there will be a good future for all of us. Happy Christmas!