

DECEMBER 2025

Thoughts of Faith

UKRAINE | CZECH REPUBLIC | LATVIA
Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Board for World Outreach

GIFT OF
LIFE —
UKRAINE

FROM THE ELS

Special Christmas Blessing

*Rev. Thomas Heyn, Administrator
Board for World Outreach*

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son ..." (John 3:16).

It's December, and I imagine our minds are already focused on Christmas. We Christians focus upon God's gift of his Son who took upon himself our human nature to begin his work of redemption. How deep is the Father's love in the gift he gave!

He continues to bless his people with gifts for the mission outreach of his church. This issue includes several special gifts. Seminarian Krišjānis Lācis speaks of the cultural changes taking place in Latvia, and asks for our prayers. Dmytro Maksymenko writes about the blessings God provides through Gift of Life, and serving the needs of people suffering from the war.

We hope you enjoy and are encouraged by their stories.

As always, be assured we are grateful for your prayers and offerings to our Lord that help support this important work. ■

Bringing Hope to Kolyndiany: Remembering the Forgotten

Dmytro Maksymenko, Director of GoL

Recently a small team from Gift of Life Ukraine traveled to the village of **Kolyndiany**, in the Ternopil region of western Ukraine. There, in a modest shelter for elderly people, 52 residents now live—most of them evacuees from Pokrovsk, a city in the Donetsk region that has suffered relentless bombardment and is now nearly surrounded by enemy forces.

Pokrovsk was once a peaceful place, known for its gardens and quiet streets. Today it stands in ruins. Those who managed to escape lost nearly everything—their homes, their belongings, and often their families. The residents of the Kolyndiany shelter are mostly in their seventies. Many have no children or grandchildren left. Their eyes tell stories of loss and endurance.

When we first heard about the shelter from the regional Department of Social Protection, officials explained that food supplies were scarce and meals very simple. We knew we had to respond. Our team brought fresh fruit, sweets, and other foods—small gifts that brought wide smiles and even tears of gratitude.

We also brought spiritual literature: New Testaments, Luther's Small Catechisms, and pocket Gospels. The residents

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▲ gifts of fruit, vegetables, and sweets



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received them with deep appreciation. All of the residents come from Eastern Ukraine, far from their new surroundings. Our volunteers spent time simply listening and talking with them, helping them feel at home. When the conversation turned to familiar topics—their homes, gardens, or faith—their faces brightened and smiles returned. One woman, Maria, told us she still dreams of the roses she once planted with her husband in Pokrovsk. Another man, Petro, showed us a faded photograph of his grandson, whom he hasn't heard from since spring.

What touched us most was not their material need but their longing for connection—someone to listen, to sit beside them, to remind them they are still seen and loved. The director of the shelter welcomed us warmly and encouraged the residents to take the spiritual books home.

God willing, Gift of Life will continue to support this shelter and hopes to bring one of our mobile medical clinics there next year.

Please keep these men and women in your prayers. May the Lord comfort them and use us all as instruments of His love and mercy. ■

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▲ sharing Christian literature



▲ a welcome gift

LATVIA

Christ Born of Woman: Advent Reflections

Krišjānis Lācis, Seminarian

As the season of Advent draws near, we in Latvia prepare our hearts once again to contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation—that the eternal Son of God took on human flesh, was born of the Virgin Mary, and came into our world as a true man. This is not a sentimental story; it is the foundation of all reality and all human dignity. God became man, not in theory or symbol, but in flesh and blood. He was conceived in a woman's womb, born into a family with a mother and a father, and raised under the authority of both. In the humility of Bethlehem, God revealed His design for humanity—male and female, father and mother, child and family.

This Advent, however, our hearts are troubled by developments in our own land. Latvia, once a steadfastly Christian nation, is being drawn into a cultural and moral struggle familiar to many of you in America. The so-called Istanbul Convention, proposed as an international treaty to protect women from violence, introduces into our legal system the notion of “social gender,” detached from biological sex. Under the cloak of compassion, this ideology redefines what it means to be man and woman, father and mother. It invites unelected international bodies to oversee and reshape the most intimate parts of our social order. All males are implicitly viewed as potential aggressors, all natural distinctions as oppressive, and all Biblical teaching about creation and family as dangerous stereotypes.

At the same time, the legalization of same-sex partnerships, the deepening demographic crisis, and the hostility toward the Church's

moral voice reveal a society losing confidence in life itself. Those who speak in defense of the created order are branded “Russian lackeys” or enemies of progress—an absurd and painful accusation for a nation, especially for Latvian Christians, who have suffered deeply under Russian domination. Yet such labeling is a sign not of strength but of fear: fear of truth, fear of the natural law written in every human heart, fear of the Gospel that calls all people, male and female, to repentance and new life in Christ.

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Against this backdrop, the Nativity of our Lord shines with renewed power. In Bethlehem we see a young woman who receives her calling as mother with faith and humility: “Be it unto me according to thy word.” We see a young man, Joseph, who bears the burden of protection, guidance, and obedience. We see God Himself honoring the created order by taking flesh from a woman, growing up under the care of a man, and entering history within a family. The Incarnation affirms not only the value of human life but the goodness of creation as God made it.

So, as Advent begins, we invite our American brethren to pray with us: that Christ would strengthen His Church in both our nations to bear witness, boldly and gently, to the truth that saves. In the Child of Mary, God has sanctified both masculinity and femininity, both fatherhood and motherhood, both body and soul. The world may rage, but the Word made flesh remains our peace, our pattern, and our hope. ■



The Day of the Private Schools

Martin Vršecký

Wednesday, November 5th was "The Day of the Private Schools" in Czechia. **Martin Luther School** opened its doors for the parents and family members of our children. Since Wednesdays are the days of Children's worship in school chapel, many parents of the youngest children joined us for the morning service. The topic of the sermon was "The Community of All Saints" (for Saturday November 1st was the All Saints festival). Our justification by Christ's redemption gives us hope that we, the redeemed, will be saved and one day will meet with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom. The text was 1 Peter 1:13-16.

After the services, **ELS President Glenn Obenberger** passed along the greetings from our brothers and sisters in the ELS and addressed the children and their parents with the message how the wrath of God was taken from people by the works of our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. We wish all brothers and sisters in Christ to have a blessed Advent season. ■



"Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:13-16).



▲ children gathered for chapel

Something New

► Intriguing images and inspirational stories from *Thoughts of Faith* ministries in Ukraine, Czechia and Latvia among other world mission fields.

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