

OPINION • ACADEMIA

# Christmas 2025 message: Saving the nation, starting from the dinner table

*The Christmas 2025 theme as declared by the PGI and the KWI urges reflection on the state of Indonesian families and how "saving" them is inherently linked to the republic's future.*

Bernardus Agus Rukiyanto (The Jakarta Post)

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**T**he narrative of Christmas is often shrouded in the aesthetics of serenity: silent nights, glowing stars and peaceful manger scenes. However, a closer look at the biblical account of the Holy Family in Nazareth reveals a story of profound vulnerability.

Joseph and Mary were not a couple living in suburban comfort; they were a family navigating the fringes of society, facing political persecution, forced migration to Egypt and the social stigma of an unconventional pregnancy. Yet the Holy Family survived, not through material wealth but through radical internal solidarity and a commitment to a higher moral calling.

As the Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI) and the Bishops' Conference of Indonesia (KWI) announce the theme of Christmas 2025, "God is Present to Save the Family" (Matthew 1:21-24), we find ourselves at a critical juncture. This theme is not merely a domestic religious sentiment; it is a sociopolitical manifesto.

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In the Indonesian context, where the fabric of society is being tugged by polarization, economic disparity and moral erosion, the family emerges not just as a demographic unit but also as the final frontier of national resilience.

To understand why the family needs “saving”, one must examine the “polycrisis” currently hollowing out Indonesian households.

Data from the Supreme Court and Statistics Indonesia (BPS) show a troubling upward trend in divorce rates over the last decade. While legal shifts play a role, the underlying causes are increasingly systemic. We are witnessing the devastating impact of the “digital underworld”, the meteoric rise of online gambling and predatory lending, which has decimated the financial and psychological stability of lower- to middle-class families.

When a father loses his livelihood to a gambling app or a mother is hounded by aggressive debt collectors, the home ceases to be a sanctuary. It becomes a site of trauma.

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Here, the Christmas message of “God’s presence” must be interpreted as a call for “structural salvation”. The state and religious institutions cannot merely offer prayers; they must address the predatory algorithms and economic injustices that target the most vulnerable households.

Furthermore, we must address “digital isolation” within the home.

Philosopher Albert Borgmann, in his seminal work *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984), introduced the “device paradigm”. He argued that modern technology tended to replace “focal things and practices”, such as the communal preparation and sharing of a meal, with “commodities” that required no engagement.

When every family member sits at the dinner table but remains siloed in their respective digital worlds, the family loses its ability to serve as a laboratory for dialogue and empathy.

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The late Pope Francis, in his 2016 apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), offers a vision that bridges the gap between the Holy Family of Nazareth and the broken families of today.

He famously described the church and by extension, the family, as a “field hospital”. Francis wrote that many families, far from considering themselves perfect, lived in love and kept moving forward, even if they fell many times along the way.

This is a crucial pivot for our national reflection. “Saving the family” does not mean striving for an idealized, cinematic version of domestic life. It means acknowledging the family as a place where wounds are treated.

In a nation frequently fractured by religious and political polarization, the family is the first place where a child learns that “the other” is not an enemy. If an Indonesian child learns to respect a sibling with a different temperament or an elder with a different view, that child is being tutored in the very essence of the state philosophy Pancasila.

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Conversely, if the home becomes a place of intolerance or domestic violence, no amount of civic education in schools can fully repair the damage to the national character.

The “salvation” of the family is the salvation of the *res publica* (public affairs). We are currently grappling with a crisis of integrity in our public institutions. Yet integrity is a virtue that is seldom born in a vacuum; it is cultivated in the cradle.

If we want a nation free from the cancer of corruption, we must look at the family as the primary site of ethical formation. When parents prioritize honesty over material gain and when the home is a place where “enough” is celebrated over “more”, the roots of corruption are severed before they can reach the ground of public office.

The Christmas 2025 theme challenges the government to move beyond macroeconomic indicators and look at “family wellness”. Salvation requires policies that protect Indonesian families from predatory tech, ensure that mental health support is as accessible as primary health care and provide a living wage that allows parents to actually be present in their children’s lives.

As we cherish the festive season this year, reflecting on the Holy Family of Nazareth serves as a mirror for Indonesia. Like Joseph and Mary, many Indonesian families are “on the move”, struggling against the Herods of modern poverty and digital fragmentation.

The presence of God in the family, as envisioned by the PGI and the KWI, is a call to “return to the table”. It is an invitation to reclaim the home as a sanctuary of truth, a “field hospital” for the weary and a school for the future citizens of the republic. If we can save the family from the forces of isolation and exploitation, we are not just celebrating a religious holiday: We are fortifying the very soul of Indonesia.

The salvation of this great nation will not be signed in a palace or decreed in legislature. It will be whispered in the prayers of parents, nurtured in the safety of bedrooms and solidified in honest conversations shared at the dinner table in 100 million homes.

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