

MARTIN LUTHER

(1483 – 1546) - PART I

"The just shall live by faith"

(Retold from "Martin Luther" written by Mike Fearon, published by Bethany House Publishers; "Martin Luther: The German Monk Who Changed the Church" written by Ben Alex, published by OM Literature; and "Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History" written by Richard M. Hannula, published by Canon Press)

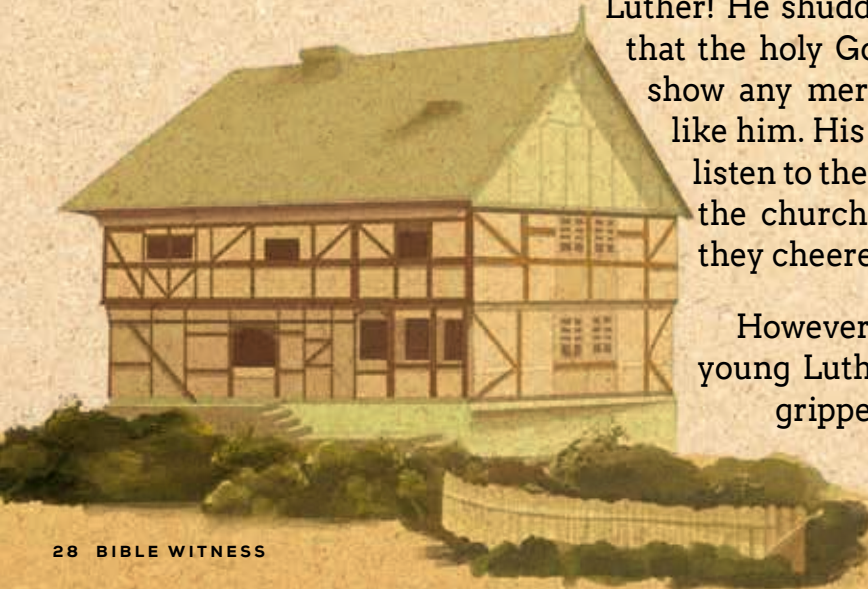
Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

On 10 November 1483, a baby boy was born to Hans and Margaretha Luther. Being devout Catholics, they had their son baptised the following day in the Church of St Peter, in their German hometown of Eisleben. It happened to be St Martin's day, so they named him "Martin", in the hope that their son Martin Luther would receive great blessings in his life.

Shortly after, the Luther family moved to a little mining town called Mansfeld in search of a better life. Hans worked hard as a miner and gradually, his family began to enjoy a comfortable middle-class life. In the meantime, more children were also born to Hans and Margaretha. As much as they loved their children, they would not spare the rod whenever necessary. Often, Luther had to bear the stinging pain of a long, thick cane on his hand or back for any minor offence that he committed. Luther's parents were also very religious, hardly missing a day of worship in the local church. Sunday after Sunday, Luther would hear the priests speaking about hell and judgment, instead of God's love and forgiveness. Poor Luther! He shuddered at the thought that the holy God would surely not show any mercy to a wicked boy like him. His only comfort was to listen to the melodious voices of the church choir and oh, how they cheered his soul!

However, come nightfall and young Luther's heart would be gripped by great terror.



All the superstitions he had picked up from his parents caused his imagination to run wild. His eyes would dart here and there, fearing some strange, wicked creatures would spring at him or carry him away to the dark woods! Feeling helpless and miserable, Luther would often cry himself to sleep. Daybreak, on the contrary, brought much relief to Luther's poor soul. He would look forward to his favourite pastime - roaming the countryside of Mansfeld, picking mushrooms and enjoying the beauty of the valleys, hills, and woods full of interesting wildlife. Such happy moments chased away all frightful thoughts of the night.

At the tender age of 5, Martin Luther began his education. To his dismay, he had to learn the rigorous rules of Latin grammar, which he found rather complex. Whenever he fumbled for words during his Latin class, severe beating would follow for sure. However, music lessons helped to bring some joy into his otherwise dreary school life. No doubt, he found much pleasure in singing than in his Latin!

In 1497, Luther turned 14, and his father sent him to a school in Magdeburg, a neighbouring town, where his friend Johann Reineck was his study companion. A group of men known as "Brothers of the Common Life" taught the students at Magdeburg. They were kind, compassionate and led an exemplary life. Luther learned advanced Latin from them and enjoyed singing in the cathedral choir. One afternoon after school, while walking along the streets of



Magdeburg, Luther and Johann chanced upon a frail-looking, skeleton-like figure (bent almost double beneath a huge sack of bread) staggering down the road ahead of them. When they were told that he was actually Prince William who had forsaken the world and been living a humble life fasting, praying and begging for food for his fellow monks, Luther thought to himself: Would God accept and love him if he were to fast and pray daily till he be all skin and bones, just like Prince William? Looking at the prince's miserable state, Martin concluded that it was too demanding to try to please God - he lost any hope of ever getting near to God!

Time flew. The one year spent in school, where he enjoyed his studies and the warm companionship of his fellow students, had helped him forget all his doubts and fears for the time being. Nonetheless, when he returned to visit his parents at Mansfeld, his father had other plans for him. He wanted Luther to continue his education at Eisenach, where his kinsfolk were; they would take good care of Luther and provide him with food and lodging. Luther, in obedience to his father's desire, entered the Latin school at St George's Church in Eisenach. The headmaster, John Trebonius, treated his students with much respect and even addressed them as "sirs" because he recognised the future scholars in them. By then, Luther had grown to be a "tall sturdy lad, not exactly handsome, but with a pleasant, honest face and lively, dark eyes".

Life at Eisenach was happy and Luther enjoyed the friendship of a close circle of friends. He also joined the church choir as he enjoyed singing very much. A wealthy Christian couple took care of his board and lodging, in exchange for his help in supervising their little son and his schoolwork. From this cultured family, Luther learned the finer things of life - "music, painting and tapestry work" - as well as met many godly Christians in their home. In school, Luther worked hard at his Latin grammar and mastered it so well that his headmaster asked him to give a welcome speech to a visiting professor of the University of Erfurt. The professor was greatly impressed by young Luther and suggested that he be sent to Erfurt for his degree course. To his happy father, that would mean bringing honour to the Luther family and, besides, he and his wife would then be sufficiently cared for in their twilight years. Deep in his heart, Hans Luther wanted his son to be a lawyer and marry a girl from a wealthy local family.

So after 3 years at Eisenach, Martin Luther proceeded to Erfurt, a much larger city than Eisenach. Erfurt was nicknamed "Little Rome" because of the great number of monks and priests in the city. At the University of Erfurt, all students were expected to be orderly and diligent. Any student who disobeyed the rules would be beaten in the presence of their fellow students. Luther, being an obedient and smart lad, did well to keep out of all troubles. Debating among students was encouraged, and Luther became such a good debater that everyone called him "the philosopher". Being also very enthusiastic and hardworking, he successfully obtained his first degree in 1502 and stayed on to study for his Master of Arts degree. Once, while in the university library, he found a copy of the Bible. It was the first time that he ever had an opportunity to read the Bible for himself (as the common people in his days were not encouraged to read the Bible, which was written in Latin). As he read on, his old fears about death and judgment returned. Though his heart was deeply troubled, Luther continued with his studies at Erfurt.

At the end of that term at Erfurt, Luther went back to Mansfeld to visit his parents as usual. It was a 3-day journey; like all students of his day, he carried a sword to protect himself in case of robbery. He walked on and was almost out of the city of Erfurt when he stumbled over the uneven ground and fell. The sword he was carrying cut his leg, resulting in a very deep wound! Though he survived this near-fatal accident, his spirit was badly shaken and the thought of death truly frightened him... How could he ever face death and judgment?

(to be continued)



Let's Go Yonder to Worship the LORD

Prabhudas Koshy

Prabhudas Koshy

E B E B/D# E A

Let's go yon-der where God's peo-ple meet, And wor-ship the LORD who is
Let's go yon-der where His faith-ful dwell, And sanc-ti-fy our hearts for
Let's go yon-der where bless-ings are found, And pray with thanks-giv-ing for the
Let's go yon-der where His Word is preached, And ren-der our ears to the

F#m B7 E B A F#m A

wor-thy of praise; Let's join all who look to His mer-cy seat, And raise our
ser-vice to Him; Let's raise our voice high that His praise may swell, And lift high His
mer-cies we need; Let's find grace with all who His throne sur-round, And make known that
Word of His pow'r; Let's yield when we are by His Word be-seech'd, And pres-ent our

B7 E Chorus E B G#m D

an-thems from hearts a-blaze.
great name in glo-ri-ous hymn. Give glo-ry to the LORD our God; As-cribe
God will bless all who plead.
lives as His shin-ing tow'r.

D A B B7

great-ness to our God; Praise Him, thank Him, seek

E A B7 E

Him, serve Him; Give glo-ry to the LORD our God.