

Martin Luther, renewer of the church



Portrait of Martin Luther (1529) by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553).

- 1483 born in Eisleben, Saxony (Germany) (November 10)
- 1505 became an Augustinian monk; ordained a priest in the Church of Rome two years later
- 1512 with a doctorate began as professor of Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Saxony
- 1517 sent 95 Theses to his bishop, disputing the practice of indulgences (October 31)
- 1520 excommunicated by the pope and declared an outlaw by the emperor
- 1521–22 while in hiding at Wartburg Castle, translated the New Testament into German
- 1525 began married life, thus establishing the Protestant parsonage; four surviving children
published German translation of the Bible, a German mass, large and small catechisms, hymns
disseminated voluminous writings throughout Europe, some catechetical, some critical
- 1546 died in Eisleben (February 18)

Assisted by the new technology of the printing press, Martin Luther's theology, spirituality, and scriptural interpretations swept through the Western world, challenging Roman church authority and nurturing the Protestant movement. His positive message was that salvation is God's free gift to everyone who has faith in Jesus Christ, and all the baptized should study the scriptures. His negative writings were harshly critical of other Christian proposals and of non-Christian religions. Although his authoritative writings altered history, shortly before his death he wrote these words: "We are beggars, this is true."

In art, Luther is best shown wearing the black doctoral robe of his teaching career and pointing to a page in an open Bible.



In order to point out an easier way for common folk (for I serve only them), I am proposing two themes concerning the freedom and servitude of the spirit: The Christian individual is a completely free lord of all, subject to none; the Christian individual is a completely dutiful servant of all, subject to all.

—Martin Luther, in the 1520 bestseller *The Freedom of a Christian*

ON FEBRUARY 18

Sing "A mighty fortress is our God," Luther's best-known hymn, which is based on Psalm 46, either a traditional translation in sixteenth-century rhythmic version (ELW 503), a traditional translation in eighteenth-century metrical arrangement (ELW 504), or an inclusive translation in eighteenth-century metrical arrangement (ELW 505).

Praise God for Christians who teach the Bible.

Pray a prayer of Martin Luther

Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in the faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbor. I do not have a strong and firm faith; at times I doubt and am unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help me. Strengthen my faith and trust in you. In you I have sealed the treasure of all I have. I am poor; you are rich and came to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; you are upright. With me, there is an abundance of sin; in you is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore I will remain with you, of whom I can receive, but to whom I may not give. Amen. (ELW, p. 87)

Pray for all who dedicate their life to the work of the church.

Pray for wisdom in our words and actions during times of controversy.