**Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)**

Martin Luther was born on November 10th, 1483 in the German town of Eisleben. He was the eldest son of Hans and Margarethe Luder. His father wanted him to be a lawyer, so he sent young Martin to schools in Mansfeld, Magdeburg and Eisenach. From 1501 he studied law at the University of Erfurt. The university had been established in 1392 and it had been one of the best universities since then.

One day, however, he was travelling back to school when he got into a terrible thunderstorm. Terrified to death after a lightning had struck near him, Luther promised to become a monk. He left university in 1505 and joined St. Augustine’s Monastery in Erfurt. In the monastery Luther lived the hard life of monks. He observed the rules, he prayed day and night and he kept reading the Bible. He celebrated his first mass in 1507.

In the same year he started studying theology at the University of Erfurt then he continued at the University of Wittenberg. In 1512 he received his doctorate and became a professor of biblical studies. He was disappointed by the luxurious way of life of the pope and the catholic clergy. The Roman Catholic Church had convinced people to buy letters of indulgence so that their sins would be forgiven. Luther claimed, as he had learnt from Saint Augustine’s teaching, that only God could give salvation by His divine grace.

According to popular belief, on October 31st, 1517 Luther nailed a copy of his 95 questions and propositions, which he had written earlier to start a debate, on the gate of the Wittenberg church. Luther’s message spread quickly and soon reached Rome. In 1521 Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther from the Roman Catholic Church after he had refused several times to withdraw his theory.

Luther was ordered to appear before the Diet of Worms summoned by Charles V, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He told his audience that he could not and would not recant anything he had written unless he was convinced by the Bible. He finished his speech with these words: “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.” The emperor declared Luther a political outlaw in the Empire and ordered to burn all his works. By this time, however, most of the rulers of the German states had left the Diet, which was a sign that more and more people started to believe in Luther.

Leaving Worms, Luther was travelling in a forest when he was kidnapped by masked soldiers. In fact, they were the men of Frederick III, or Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony. They took Luther to the castle of Wartburg near Eisenach where he enjoyed Frederick’s hospitality for almost two years. During his secret stay in Wartburg castle Luther began to translate the New Testament from Greek into German. He finished it in 1522 while the Old Testament was completed in 1534.

While he was hiding in Wartburg castle riots broke out in the country, so he returned to Wittenberg. By this time many other reformers had appeared, some of them were more radical. Emperor Charles realized that the process could not be stopped so he summoned another diet in Speyer in 1529. The Diet recognized the reformation but it ordered the reformers to obey the catholic bishops and forbade any further reformation. Many rulers taking part in the Diet who had become followers of Luther protested against this. This is how the term “Protestant” was born.

Készítette: Grubisics Roland