

Martin Luther in 3-D

Production notes: For simplicity "Martin" will refer to young Martin Luther. "Luther" refers to a mature Luther reflecting with his wife, Katie.

Organ prelude of several of Luther's hymns (*NOT A Mighty Fortress*)

Pastor : Welcome to our dramatization of **Martin Luther in 3-D**. This is more than a show for your entertainment. It is our hope that you will learn something about the founder of the Lutheran Church and the Father of the Reformation Movement of Western Christendom. Perhaps you will learn something for the first time. Maybe you will be reminded of something you once knew and have forgotten. It is our hope that Luther will come alive for this short time and that we might all be inspired to reflect on his faithfulness and service, and put them to work in our lives. Three scenes from Luther's life will be presented-each with some conversation between Luther and his wife, Katie, and each with a flashback to a significant moment in Luther's life.

Let us begin by praying together a prayer by Martin Luther published in his *Little Book of Prayers*.

Behold, Lord, an empty vessel that needs to be filled. My lord, fill it. I am weak in faith: strengthen thou me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me fervent, that my love may go out to my neighbor. Strengthen my faith and trust in thee. I am poor; thou art rich, and didst come to be merciful to the poor. I am a sinner; thou art upright. With me there is an abundance of sin; in thee is the fullness of righteousness. Therefore, I will remain with thee, from whom I can receive, but to whom I can give nothing. Amen.

Let us continue by singing together the first verse of "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*", **Hymn #229**. Between scenes we will sing other verses from this hymn by Martin Luther. You can take your cue from the organ introduction.

Scene 1: The Discovery (Road near Stotternheim , 1505, near Erfurt, Germany) *The church is darkened except for the lights above the steps. The lights above the altar are flashing as lightning. Sound effects of a thunderstorm begin. Martin, wearing layman's clothes and a cloak pulled tightly about him, carrying a stack of books makes his way from the back of the church to the front, fighting imaginary winds and rain, dodging lightning. Once he reaches the steps all is black for one second, then the lights flash brightly as a bright bolt of lightning flashes.*

Martin (dropping to his knees, spilling his books, and cowering behind his cloak, cries out): Help, save me, St. Anne, I will become a monk!

Lights dim

Luther (*standing in the pulpit, feather pen in hand writing furiously, looks up reflecting, shakes his head, and goes back to writing*)

Center stage there is a pair of chairs with a table between them upon which sit two mugs and a loaf of bread.

Katie: (rises from a chair) Martin, Martin! (She crosses over to the base of the pulpit, cups her hands, and calls again) Martin!

Luther: (*startles*) What is it Lord Katie?

Katie: Dinner is passed and I have saved you some ale and bread, which is not easy to do given the hungry and thirsty mob we have as guests these days.

Luther: I am thankful for your thoughts of me. I don't know what I would do without you looking to my health and well-being.

Katie: I'll tell you what you would do. You would be back to the skeleton of a man I married, forgetting about food and drink and thinking only of your writing, preaching, and debates.

Luther: I hunger and thirst only for the Lord.

Katie: And that is exactly why the Lord brought me into your life, to keep you from starving yourself to death!

Luther: (*Coming down the pulpit steps patting his stomach*) I am hardly starving now, thanks to you, my Morning Star of Wittenberg. (*Crosses over to the left chair and sits down. Takes a long drink from the mug*) Ahhh. What did I do before I tasted your famous homemade ale? It is your ale which attracts the guests and visitors.

Katie: (*Smiling at the compliment*) No, it is the great Dr. Luther who attracts the crowds. They all come here hoping for a morsel of your wisdom to drop from your table. What are you working on now up there in your tower room, Martin?

Luther: I am continuing my work on the translation of the Bible.

Katie: Do you still struggle with translating it into German?

Luther: Good heavens, how hard it is to make the Hebrew prophets speak German! They resist giving up their native tongue for a barbarous idiom, just as the nightingale would not change her sweet song to imitate the cuckoo. But I just now was distracted by a past memory.

Katie: What memory was that? The memory of our romantic courtship?

Luther: Ha! Will you never let me forget that I first resisted the idea of our marriage?

Katie: But I would not be discouraged, would I?

Luther: You were stubborn and willful. You were in my care, and yet repeatedly refused the matches I made for you.

Katie: You wanted to match me with old men, and stern, unsmiling men.

Luther: I was an old man.

Katie: Only 41.

Luther: Yes, but I also was an outlaw in seclusion, hiding out from the Pope and his henchmen. What kind of future would that be for a young 26 year-old woman?

Katie: And was it my father's wealth that convinced you to marry me? (*Laughing*)

Luther: No, you know it was MY father's edicts and pleas for me to marry. It was his, "Honor your father and mother", that finally pushed me over the edge.

Katie: (*Giving him a playful shove*) And have you been so miserable in this forced marriage?

Luther: No, my dear Katie, I would not exchange you for France or Venice. God has given you to me... Besides, other women have worse faults. (*She is up on her feet with her hands on her hips. Luther fakes cowering*) Don't you want to know what DID distract me in my work?

Katie: (*Sitting back down*) Well, yes, what was it?

Luther: It was my recurring memory of what sent me into the monastery in the first place.

Katie: The thunderstorm again?

Luther: Yes.

Katie: I often hear your veteran students sharing that dramatic account with the new ones.

Luther: Yes, they all seem to know of it.

Katie: To them it represents the Lord pressing you into his will for your life.

Luther: I am still wondering about that.

Katie: You incurred the wrath of your father because of your decision.

Luther: He contended that it was not the will of the Lord, but the delusion of the devil that sent me to the monastery. And... my friends tried furiously to discourage me. They told me I was not bound by a vow in a storm. But, that vow in a storm altered my life, and still haunts me.

Katie: The Lord provided counsel for you. You were in good hands at the monastery.

Luther: Ah yes, I don't know what would have become of me had it not been for Father von Staupitz. Ah, I remember those days...

Lights fade. The screen comes down to cover the Luthers. When they come up again, young Martin is kneeling on the steps in a white, hooded robe and Father von Staupitz is standing over him in a black one.

Staupitz: What do you seek?

Martin: God's grace and your mercy.

Staupitz: (*Bids Martin to stand*) Are you married?

Martin: No, I am not.

Staupitz: Do you have obligations to anyone that are binding?

Martin: No, I do not.

Staupitz: Are you diseased?

Martin: No, I am not.

Staupitz: Are you willing to suffer poverty, humility, and chastity? This life will be a strenuous and harsh one.

Martin: Yes, with God's help, in so far as human frailty permits.

Staupitz gives Martin the two-sided embrace and they walk out together exiting through the Sacristy.

Martin reenters and lays face-down across the steps. Staupitz enters.

Staupitz: Brother Luther, why do you torture yourself with prayers, fasting, vigils, and freezing so that you almost die of cold?

Martin: I want God to see how well I keep the rule of the order and how strict a life I can lead. God is a stern and horrible judge. My heart is in a constant state of sin. I must constantly pray and confess as new, sinful thoughts enter my head.

Staupitz: Be moderate in your self-discipline. Maltreating your body is itself a sin.

Martin: But our rule also says, "Woe to the monk who loves his health more than holiness".

Staupitz: According to the Creed we believe in the forgiveness of sins. Despair is a deadly sin. God has commanded you to hope.

Martin: Yes, but no one dare hope without merits; your words do not apply to me

Staupitz: Don't worry so much over God's justice. Think of his mercy. *(Staupitz exits. Martin climbs to the pulpit and opens the Bible.)*

Martin: Now to keep me busy, I have been given increased duties. I am to study theology, teach, and preach. I don't have times for my bouts with despair. I am now preparing lectures on Romans... Romans 1:17 It is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." What does this mean? *(He comes down from the pulpit and Staupitz enters through the sacristy door)*

Staupitz: You are suffering again from your spiritual attacks. I cannot pretend to understand these bouts of despair, but they seem more necessary to you than food and drink. They seem to catapult you forward in your journey. God will use you to accomplish great things.

Martin: How can I love a God who keeps men confused and uncertain whether or not he has chosen them for salvation?

Staupitz: Look at it through the wounds of Christ. Real repentance is not an elaborate technique; it is simply and unaffectedly casting yourself upon God's mercy. It begins in your love of God. It is not a way to win God's love.

Martin: I am beginning to see. Once there was no word that I hated more than penitence. Now there is no word sweeter. God is my Loving Savior to whom I can turn again and again for help. By faith I can live. *(They exit down the center aisle as the organ begins an intro for verse two.)*

Congregation sings verse 2 of "A Mighty Fortress is our God".

Scene 2: The Decision. *(The screen goes up and the Luthers are sitting in their chairs).*

Katie: What next, Martin? Where will you be off to next?

Luther: I will stay here for a while and continue working on my translation of the Bible. I have some other projects going as well. These days I can hardly keep up with the requests for my council. I have some sermons to write, and as you know, I am not feeling well enough to travel lately.

Katie: You do love to preach.

Luther: I love to bring the good news of the Gospel to every person. I remember being called to pastor the Stadtkirche.

Katie: Yes, the city church in Wittenberg. It gave you an outlet for your newly discovered truths.

Luther: It gave me a way to reach earnest ears.

Katie: The crowds came. THEY were hungry and thirsty for the Word, and you were eager to feed it to them.

Luther: But there were no crowds on October 31, 1517.

Katie: Yes, there were crowds, but they were coming to receive Holy Communion, and view the Relics of Frederick the Wise. Few noticed your parchment hanging on the church door.

(Screen comes down. Martin is in the pulpit. Staupitz is on the steps.)

Staupitz: What are you doing now, Martin. You have fire in your eyes. For us, that usually means trouble. Are you planning a sermon to attack the papacy in Rome on the eve of All Saints Day?

Luther: I want only the chance to debate my views with other theologians, I see so many things in our Church which don't seem to be founded in the scriptures. I want only for someone to show me the basis for the practices and traditions of the church. If someone can show me I will be silent.

Staupitz: Yes, find your answers, Martin, but do it quietly. Do it in a way that will not bring dishonor upon our order. *(Staupitz exits. Luther writes for a moment longer then storms down from the pulpit with a parchment and hammer in his hand. He kneels on the steps facing the altar (screen) and prays. He rises and walks toward the back of the church with a deliberate step ... a man on a mission. He nails the parchment to the church door and exits through it. Screen goes up on the Luthers.)*

Katie: You didn't intend for your 95 theses to be the talk of Germany.

Luther: And Rome?

Katie: And Rome.

Luther: No, I only meant it to be a wakeup call for the Church. The church was so off course, and taking the whole of humanity with it. I feared for the souls of everyone, so easily lead astray. I only wanted to see God's Church back on the right track. That is why I wrote them in Latin, the language of the scholars, and not German, the language of the people.

Katie: Yes, but they were translated immediately, and thanks to the printing press, they were in the hands of all of Germany in a short time. Did you set out to write 95 complaints against our church?

Luther: Not at all. I was mostly disturbed about the whole issue around indulgences. It upset me so much when the parishioners would come to me for confession and declare their sins already forgiven. When I asked about this forgiveness I learned about Tetzel's operation across the border. Frederick forbade him from selling here in Saxony. I had no idea so many of our Wittenbergers were traveling as far as twenty miles to find him. I heard he was a shrewd salesman, entering the towns with a fanfare of trumpets and bells. He would preach of hell and purgatory. Then he would set up his table and begin to sell.

Katie: What was his little slogan?

Luther: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs." What upset me even more was that he professed that these pieces of paper released already departed relatives from an eternity in purgatory.

Katie: All the while fattening the treasury of Leo for his building of St. Peters.

Luther: All for his own vanity and glory, not the glory of God. What angered me most was the number of common folk who flocked to Tetzel turning over their money for false forgiveness.

Katie: When it was not his to grant.

Luther: When I looked closely and began to question the sale of indulgences, I had to question the whole issue of forgiveness, and thus looked from issue to issue and became very discouraged with the state of the Church. I had hope for reform. I had plans for change. I had no plans for dividing the church. The Word was my guide. I couldn't abide, and I won't to this day, abide with idolatry and traditions based on the church, the pope, or councils of men. If there is no basis in scripture there is no obligation to follow.

Katie: You still feel strongly after all of these years. After hundreds of writings, sermons, letters. You still have the passion and the unbelievable mission to publish it for all to read. Where do you get your energy?

Luther: I get my motivation and energy from God and His Word. There is still more to do.

Katie: I am concerned about your health. I know you are feeling ill many days. You are often in pain.

Luther: I would be in more pain if I were idle.

Katie: And you would have a worse disposition too. Write Martin. Go to your tower room and write. I'll call you when it is time to eat again. *(They both Exit)*

The Congregation sings the third verse of A Mighty Fortress...

Scene 3: The Defense *(Martin is in the pulpit, writing.)*

Martin: *(Speaking as he writes)*

Dear Lord Frederick the Wise,

It is the eve before my appearance at the Diet of Worms. I am ever grateful for your protection and support. You have kept me safe, allowing me to accomplish much. Even for this trip to Worms I was granted "safe passage" by Rome, thanks to you. Through your protection, I have been able to do much writing to educate our German brothers and sisters. I have been asked to recant my writings many times. I would do so in a minute if just once I could be convinced of where I am wrong in my teachings, according to the Scriptures. But the arguments against me are always based on the tradition of the Holy Catholic Church, not the Gospel of Christ. I am asked where I get my authority. I get it from the Word of God, from the Bible itself. I believe that a Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to no MAN. These are the very words of St. Paul. But, also, a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all men, subject to all.

Faith is the "wedding ring" which unites us with Christ, so that what he has done for us becomes effective in us. This is the power to make us cheerfully obedient to God. Faith makes us all kings and princes in Christ.

I am closing now, your highness as I need to pray, read, and prepare for tomorrow when I stand before the Diet of Worms. I am hoping for the chance to speak. I want one more chance to try to convince the church of the need for reform. This is the cause of God, of all Christendom, and of the whole German nation-not that of a single man, much less mine. The issue here is the gospel of Christ. You fear for my safety, lord. No one's danger can be considered here. We must rather take care not to expose the gospel to the mockery of the ungodly, and thus give our enemies a reason for boasting over us that we dare not confess what we have taught. *(Bows his head)*

Dear Lord God,

We commend our cause, once again, to you.

(Lights dim. Martin leaves the pulpit. From behind the scenes we hear a short debate.)

Spokesman: Gentlemen, we have assembled here at Worms. What is our best strategy for this Luther? How do we best work this to our advantage?

Other member: We must be very careful. All of Germany is in full revolt. Nine-tenths raise the war- cry 'Luther!' While the watchword of the other tenth, who don't care about Luther, is 'Death to the Roman Court!'. But, now that Emperor Charles has summoned the honorable, dear, and pious Dr. Luther to this hearing here at Worms we must be about our business.

Spokesman: He and his companions entered the city with a triumphal procession. He preached in towns along the way.

Other member: I am told thousands have come here to see him. They hail him as a hero.

Spokesman: We must be careful how we proceed.

Other member: You must not permit him to speak. Above all else. Do NOT give him the floor!

(Martin enters from the back of the church, and walks up the center aisle)

Martin: *(Looking around in wonder)* God will be with me! *(He climbs the steps and faces the congregation. Near the Baptismal Font is a small table littered with Luther's book and writings. The spokesman enters from the back of the church and walks midway up the center aisle.)*

Spokesman *(speaking sharply)* Do you acknowledge that these books are yours? And do you intend to defend them and stand by them?

Other member: *(From behind the scenes)* Let the titles be read!

Martin: *(Walks over to the table of books. In a low voice)* The books are all mine, and I have written others. As for the second question, however, that concerns faith and the salvation of souls, and the Word of God. To say too little or too much would be dangerous. Christ said, "Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my father." Therefore I beg, with all respect, that your Imperial Majesty *(turns toward the congregation)* will give me time to think it over *(Desperately)* I need more time!

Spokesman: Martin, you knew why you were summoned here. There is no reason why further time should be granted. Nevertheless, His Imperial Majesty graciously gives you one day to deliberate.

(Lights dim. Spokesman exits)

Martin: *(falls to his knees and prays. When he rises he turns to the congregation.)*

With Christ's help, I shall not recant a single particle.

Other member: *(from behind the scenes)* It is now the next day, April 18, 1521.

Late in the day Luther and the Emperor's Spokesman return to the hearing. You are no longer the congregation of Redeemer. You are the crowd at Luther's hearing. Watch and listen closely for your cue. You will take your cue from Luther.

Spokesman: *(Enters the church from the rear and again takes his place at the center aisle. Martin enters through the Sacristy door and takes his place on the steps facing the congregation, standing tall and confident. Speaking sharply)* Do you acknowledge that these books are yours? And do you intend to defend and stand by them?

(Martin enters through the Sacristy door and takes his place on the steps facing the congregation, standing tall and confident.)

Martin: All my books are not one kind. *(Walks over to table and picks them up as he speaks of them.)* Some of them deal with faith and life so simply and evangelically that even my enemies must regard them as useful for Christians... These I cannot recant without damning the truth which all confess. A second group assails the papacy, whose evil teaching and example have devastated the world. IF I withdrew these books, I would open the door to more tyranny and ungodliness. A third class contains attacks on certain individuals who tore down my Christian teaching. I admit that I have been more caustic than is becoming of a minister. But I am being judged not for my life, but for the teaching of Christ. I cannot renounce these works either, without promoting tyranny and ungodliness.

Spokesman *(severely)* Luther, you have not answered to the point. Give a simple, unambiguous answer. Will you recant or not?

Martin: *(Addressing the congregation. Starting calmly)* Your Majesty and your Lordships ask for a plain answer. Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason- I do not accept the authority of popes or councils, since they have often contradicted one another- my conscience is captive to the Word of God *(voice rising to near anger)*. I cannot and WILL NOT recant anything, for to act against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise! God help me! Amen.

(He bows his head. Lights dim . Martin exits. The screen rises to show the two empty chairs. Luther is in the pulpit and Katie enters through the Sacristy door.)

Luther: *(Looks up from his writing)* Katie, is that you?

Katie: Yes, Martin. I am surprised that you even heard me. You must be distracted again.

Luther: I am. I wonder at the faithfulness of the Lord. I marvel at how he has protected me from my enemies.

Katie: You have friends in high places.

Luther: God in his providence often works his will through the deeds of princes.

Katie: Yes. Your disappearance after the diet at Worms was a blessing and saved your life, surely.

Luther: *(Reflecting)* I will never forget that trip as long as I live. The night still haunts me. Even though I knew of the plans for my kidnapping, I was still caught unprepared. Even Frederick did not know where they were taking me even though it was his doing that I was abducted.

Katie: Frederick insisted he NOT know for his own protection, as well as yours. They called him Frederick the Wise for a reason.

Luther: I was blessed by his protection and the protection of his successors.

Katie: All of Germany was relieved when your pen began to write again. You wrote as much in these last fifteen years as you did the previous twenty! Even in your illness you continue to write.

Luther: Would that all of my 60,000 pages disappear and there would remain only the Bible. Speaking of the Bible, I must get back to my most important project ever.

Katie: The German translation of the Bible. The Luther Bible.

Luther: *(Coming down out of the pulpit and walking toward Katie on the steps)* I ask that people call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. Who is this Luther? My teaching is not my own, nor have I been crucified for anyone. Why should it happen to me, miserable stinking bag of worms that I am, that the children of Christ should be called by my insignificant name? I am not anybody's master, nor do I wish to be. With the one church I have in common the teaching of Christ who alone is our master. *(Both exit down the center aisle. All actors walk down the center aisle, remain in costume, and go to the Narthex to greet people as they leave the Nave.)*

Congregation sings the final verse of "A Mighty Fortress"

Written by: Diana Griffith - Redeemer, Lancaster, PA Edited & Revised by Rev. Wayne Moritz - Redeemer, Lancaster, PA