

Luther's Rose

by Barb Jurgens

As a student I was drawn to a portrait that hung in our church's confirmation classroom. It depicted a sailor, struggling to guide his vessel during a storm at sea. There, behind him at the wheel, was Jesus guiding him, as he bravely tried to make his way through stormy waters.

In his day, Martin Luther found challenges too, as he tried to make his way through troubling times for the church. By soul searching, study of the Scriptures and fervent prayer, he was led to a realization which didn't seem to align with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church of that day: the erroneous belief that good works would earn one's salvation.

Through his study of God's Word, Luther became fixated upon the words from Ephesians 2:8-9: "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*" These verses established the necessity of faith in Christ as the only means of being made right with God. In other words, no human effort can earn our salvation.

This understanding of God's grace propelled him to attempt to make reforms in the Church.

To represent his theology, he designed a seal, the illustration of which we have come to know as Luther's Rose. It has now become recognized as a symbol of Lutheranism.

In a letter written to one of his friends in 1530 A.D., Luther gives an explanation of its meaning. In its centre is a black cross, which reminds us that it is



faith in the Crucified one that saves us. Even though it is a black cross, it doesn't destroy our nature but keeps us alive—because as Scripture says "... *the justified shall live by faith*" (Romans 1:17). The heart stands in the middle of a white rose to show that faith gives comfort, peace and joy. Luther went on to say that it is white because this is the colour of the angels (Matthew 28:3). This rose stands in a sky blue background, symbolizing

the joyful spirit and faith—a beginning of future heavenly joy, which begins now, but is only grasped in hope, and has not been fully revealed. Around this background is a golden ring to show that happiness and joy in heaven has no end but lasts forever, just as gold is the highest most noble and precious metal.

Luther's Reformation was centred on three key beliefs: "*Word (Scripture) Alone,*" "*Grace Alone,*" and "*Faith Alone.*" You might see these three tenets inscribed in the golden ring, just mentioned above, (especially in some church stained-glass windows). Some scholars have gone so far as to say that the five petals of the white rose include the above three tenets, as well as two additional ones: "*Christ Alone*" and "*Glory to God Alone.*"

We give all praise and thanks to God for His servant Martin Luther, for the reforms he made to have us fix our eyes more closely upon God's Holy Word. May God keep us strong in this faith and continue to proclaim Christ Crucified!