

Life of Luther: Wife, Family, and Home

Presentation Slides

Slide 1

Title Slide

Slide 2

"Good heavens! They won't give me a wife," exclaimed the reformer concerning the marriages of monks and nuns. Since taking the vows of an Augustinian monk, Luther's thoughts of marriage must have been thought to have been long removed. However before to long, he would be speaking himself about "pigtales on his pillow."

Slide 3

Though he was no longer bound to his vow of chastity, there were several reasons for his reluctance to marry. He had been excommunicated, branded a heretic worthy of death, was overworked, and was suffering from poor health. Quite simply, he didn't expect to live long.

In marriage Luther did more than provide a solution for a former nun with no husband. Living happily for more than twenty years with his wife and children, he was able to please his father (who desired grandchildren), irk the pope and his bishops, and spite the devil. At the same time, he was able to live life as a Christian family man enjoying wife, children, and home as God had intended for him. It seems many sources of Luther history like to point out in the year prior to his marriage he never bothered to make his own bed. How he could not take care of himself and needed a wife.

Slide 4

Just as God's word freed him in regards to Christ's full satisfaction for all sin, God's word also freed him from the false idea that priests, monks, and nuns were more honorable to God on account of their chastity. The not so hidden abuse by the unmarried religious was obvious. Though Luther did not deny that chastity was possible, he knew for most such attempt to live without sex was like going without food or drink. Forced celibacy is unrealistic. Like faith itself, only God could provide such a gift.

Agreeing with Paul that, *it is better to marry than burn with passion (1 Corinthians 7:9b)* he came to realize that a life tormented by desire would be far better to be married. Once Luther grasped Rome's error regarding chastity he encouraged other monks and nuns to marry, acknowledging that marriage is surely a purer state than that of monasticism. He would now confess belief in God's word regarding marriage even for priests and monks; *He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD. (Proverbs 18:22)*

Slide 5

In his treatise "Against the So-Called Spiritual Estate of the Pope and the Bishops," Luther wrote: "Many of the young women in nunneries, who are bright, healthy, and are created by God to be married and to have children, cannot comply with that status by their own willpower, for chastity is a grace higher than nature. A young woman who has not been given this high and unusual grace cannot exist without a husband as without eating, drinking, sleeping, or any other natural necessities. On the other hand, a man cannot exist without a wife. The reason for this is that begetting children is as deeply implanted in our nature as eating and drinking. Whoever wants to repudiate this and fight what nature will and must do acts the same as one who disavows that nature is nature, that fire burns, that water is wet, and that a person eats, drinks, and sleeps."

Through His word God changed the reformer's view of marriage. In denying the meritorious value of celibacy, Luther elevated marriage as a reflection of God's natural order of creation. For the former monk who was reluctant to marry for himself, God sent a wife to love and care for him, giving Martin a chance to testify to his faith in more than just writing.

Slide 6

It was shortly after the death of Elector Frederick the Wise, and in the midst of the Peasants War when Luther did marry. The wedding was thought to have been officiated by Pastor Bugenhagen, June 13, 1525. Others present that evening may have been Justus Jonas, Lucas Cranach and his wife, and Wittenberg University law professor Dr. Apel. Two weeks later a special service was held at the City Church to serve as a public announcement of their marriage as husband and wife. It was then that Luther's aging parents and many others were able to attend the service and wedding feast that followed.

Slide 7

In the fall of 1524 Luther had informed Spalatin, in a letter that he had no intention of marrying. The fact that his life was in constant jeopardy, and he was so busy seemed to make him unsuitable for marriage. However in the spring he wrote again; this time indicating that if Spalatin did not get married soon himself, Luther was likely to beat him to it.

Marriage to the former nun Katharina von Bora, was a surprise to many and disappointment for others. Luther was said to have surprised himself writing a friend, "Suddenly, and unexpectedly, and while my mind was on other matters, the Lord has snared me with the yoke of marriage." Close friend Philip Melancthon. was among those disappointed. Though not having been invited to the wedding he later came to approve of Luther's choice in hopes that perhaps his new wife would cure him of his coarse jokes.

Slide 8

Katharina who was sixteen years younger than Martin, was born January 29, 1499 to Hans von Bora, and Anna von Haugwitz. She had three brothers, Hans, Klement, and Florian and some sources have thought she may have also had a sister. After her mother died in 1505, her father quickly remarried. His new wife Margarete von Seidewitz, was a widow herself, who had several children and no way to help Hans von Bora's financial situation. At six years of age Katharina was first sent to a Benedictine cloister at Brehna, and eventually to the Cistercian cloister Marienthron, at Nimbschen.

Slide 9

At Marienthron, there were relatives on both sides of her family. The abbess, Margarete von Haubitz was related on her mother's side, and Magdalene von Bora, was an aunt from her father's side. At age ten, Katharina entered a long trial period as a candidate for admission into the order. At sixteen, she vowed obedience, poverty, and chastity in the order where she thought she would remain the rest of her life.

There is only speculation as to how the nuns at Marienthron learned of, and became sympathetic with the work and writings of Martin Luther. Initially some of the nuns failed in an appeal to have their families help them withdraw from the convent.

Slide 10

Eventually a friend of Luther's, Leonhard Koppe, a merchant from Torgau, along with his nephew, and another young man provided escape for Katharina and eleven other nuns including her Aunt

Lena who would become a part of the Luther home. Koppe's wagon of empty fish barrels were not so empty the night of April 4, 1523, as he departed the convent on the eve of the Resurrection, with the twelve nuns inside. His drastic action a capital offense.

Three of the escaped nuns were immediately returned to their families, and the other nine went to Wittenberg, where all but Katharina were soon married. Katharina first lived with prominent Luther supporters, Philipp and Elsa Reichenbach during part of the two years after her escape. There she was proved effective in learning how to manage a household, which was good preparation for her as a Luther's future wife.

Slide 11

Martin was not her first choice for a husband. However Jerome Baumgartner's family rejected her as a bride for their son, and he respected his parents desire. After her estrangement from Jerome, Katharina took a position with Lucas Cranach's family. And after she rejected the idea of Dr. Glatz, as a potential husband, she boldly suggested to a friend that she would be willing to marry Dr. Amsdorf, or even Luther himself.

Outward beauty is not usually the description of Katharina. Noted for her intelligence, hard work, and love for God and her family, she possessed an inner beauty that made Luther come to call her his "rib," and even "Lord Kate." Lecturing after he had been married for five years, he remarked, "This life has nothing more lovely and delightful than a woman who loves her husband." He said, he would not have surrendered her for France and Venice, also telling her, "Kate, you have a man who loves you." Though they may not have entered marriage head over heels in love, in marriage love certainly grew.

Slide 12

On October 21, 1525, Luther confided to a friend, "My Katharine is fulfilling Genesis 1:28." And a couple of days later he wrote another, "There is about to be born a child of a monk and a nun. Such a child must have a great lord for a godfather. Therefore I am inviting you. I cannot be precise as to the time." Then on June 8th, he sent the news "my dear Katie brought into the world yesterday by God's grace at two o'clock a little son, Hans Luther. I must stop. Sick Katie calls me." That same day Hans was baptized.

So began the Luther family with Hans the first of their six children. He would be joined by, Elizabeth (December 10, 1527) Magdalena (December 17, 1529) Martin (November 9, 1531) Paul (January 28, 1533) Margareta (December 17, 1534). Beside their own children there were also at least four orphaned children of relatives raised in the Luther home.

Slide 13

Luther expressed both his joy and sorrow in a public way. At the death of their daughters Elizabeth as an infant, and Magdalena at fourteen years of age, both Martin and Katharina grieved heavily. At Magdalena's deathbed Luther spoke of his dying daughter, "I love her very much, but, dear God, if it be Thy will to take her, I submit to Thee." Then he said to her as she lay dying: "Magdalena, my dear little daughter, would you like to stay here with your father, or would you willingly go to your Father yonder?" She answered: "Darling father, as God wills." Upon her death he said, "I am happy in spirit, but the flesh is sorrowful and will not be content; the parting grieves me beyond measure...I have sent a saint to heaven."

Slide 14

The rest of the Luther children outlived their parents. Hans went on to study law, holding a government position most of his life. Paul studied medicine and became a prominent court physician to the electors of Saxony. Martin studied theology, though on account of poor health was able to do little work, dying at the young age of thirty-four. Margareta married into an influential family, yet she also died young. It is through her that the Luther family line still exists today.

Slide 15

The training of Luther's children was strict, but loving. Just as marriage was opportunity for Luther to testify to his teaching, so was that of parenting. He would say the rearing of children is a trial for both parents. And to one of his children, Luther said, "Child, what have you done that I should love you so? You have disturbed the whole household with your bawling" And once upset by an offense, Luther remained away from Hans's presence for three days.

In his home Luther taught his children and visitors alike from his small catechism just as he recommended for others. Though very busy, he frequently found time to devote to his children. One time saying of them, "They [children] are far more learned in faith than we old people; for they believe in all simplicity, without any disputing and doubting, that God is gracious to them and there is an eternal life after this one."

Slide 16

The Augustinian Black Cloister, that came to be known as the Lutherhaus, was originally built in 1502. The monastery at Wittenberg, as well as other priories of the Augustinian order were called Black Cloisters because of the brother's black cowl with long wide sleeves and a large pointed hood and scapular.

Elector John, successor of Elector Frederick gave the couple the monastery for their home. The building that once housed 40 monks would prove to be more than adequate for the large number who would live with or visit in the Luther household. It was said that even on their wedding night Andreas Karlstadt, who was fleeing the Peasants' War came asking for and received shelter.

The many small rooms of the monastery were made into larger more suitable rooms for the growing family and the host of others who stayed there. Their home was always open for extended family, poor students and visitors. Katharina managed the home for themselves and the many others quite well, in spite of the large necessity, along with Martin's unconcern regarding money and the handling of it. Her education at the convent proved helpful as she learned quickly and worked hard at taking care of her family's financial affairs as well as caring for their physical well being.

Slide 17

As an expression of thanks toward Luther's work, on February 4, 1532, Elector John officially and quietly transferred ownership of the Black Cloister to Martin and Katharina Luther and their heirs. The Luther household never became extremely wealthy by the world's standards. Even after increased salary and many gifts there was always a struggle just to make ends meet. However they became an efficient household with ample gardens, a fish pond, and other acquired property holdings including a farm at Zulsdorf. Katharina's example for Christian wives complimented her husband's teaching on Christian marriage and family life.

Slide 18

Activity in the Luther home outside of raising a family is best known for that at Luther's table and not so much for food served but the talk at the table. Though the central figure was said to be Luther himself, reading even a small sample of the recorded statements and conversations it is clear the true central figure in all of Luther's life was the Lord who had freed him from the bondage's of sin, and forced celibacy to live the life intended for him by God as husband, father, and pastor. Often the talk would be regarding God's will for marriage, family, and home. In this Luther lived just as he taught.

Slide 19

The Gospel of Christ

Great Lakes Pastoral Conference
Fond du lac, WI
September , 2009
Pastor Edward Starkey

Bibliography

Bainton, Roland H. Here I Stand, A life of Martin Luther, Abington Press, Nashville, 1978
Kittelson, James M. Luther the Reformer: the Man and His Career. Augsburg Press, Minneapolis 1986
Markwald, Rudolf K. and Marilyn Morris, Katharina Von Bora A Reformation Life, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2002
Plass, Ewald M. This is Luther A Character Study, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1948
Roth, S. J. and Wm. A. Kramer, The Church Through the Ages, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1949
Schwiebert, E.G. Luther and His Times The Reformation From A New Perspective, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1950
Spitz, Lewis W. The Protestant Reformation Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1985

On account of the fact that all of the quotes in this paper are from Luther himself footnotes have been omitted.

Presentation slides by DPS.