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# CHURCH HISTORY MONTHLY

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## Timeline of Topics.

- Quote:
- Martin Luther, 1500s
- Early Church
- The origin of the fish symbol
- Reformation
- What Martin Luther did to get through a plague
- Extra
- Past newsletters



Iasous I  
 CHristus CH  
 THEos TH  
 Uio U  
 Sotar S

===  
 which means,  
 in English,  
 ===  
 ==

Jesus  
 Christ  
 God's  
 Son  
 Savior

It was a code word used by Christians in conversation as well as in homes and hiding places. If the Romans saw it in your house as decoration, they would not think you were a Christian, just that you liked fish. I have also read that if you wanted to know if someone else was a Christian, you would make a mark in the sand like half of the fish. If the other person made the other mark, then you both knew the other was a Christian.

## WHY DO CHRISTIANS DO THAT?: THE ORIGIN OF THE FISH SYMBOL

Most people know why Christians use crosses as a symbol. But why do so many Christians display the fish as a sign of their faith? Was fish Jesus' favorite food? No, but there is a reason for the fish as an indication of followers of Jesus.



It developed at a time of fear, torture, and secrecy and it was probably used as a symbol more frequently than the cross. Why? The method of execution that the Romans frequently (but not always) used was a cross. But consider this: why did the Romans chose the more costly and time-consuming practice of crucifixion when there were cheaper and quicker ways of death? To make a statement. Put a few people up on crosses around a city, and the message of control is plainly understood. So, everyone feared crosses. See why the cross wasn't used as a symbol of Christianity early on? Wearing or having a cross as decoration to people of that time would not have meant the same thing it means today; instead of a symbol for Christ's sacrifice, it would have been, well, I don't know what people would have thought of someone walking around with a cross around their neck in those days.

You can see why the cross did not catch on as a symbol of the first Christians. But that doesn't make it easier to understand they chose a fish. Looking at the Bible, we see that Jesus made two references to fish. First, he told some of his disciples that he would make them "fishers of men." Second, he fed 5000 people with fishes and loaves of bread. But those weren't the reason. Now we get back to the persecution and secrecy aspect.

During a time of persecution, you couldn't just go around telling everyone you were a Christian because you might be killed. So they developed a code (so the story goes). But why a fish? Because of what the letters stand for. "Fish" in Greek is "ichthus." Using the letters from "ichthus" as the first letters of words, you came up with the code on the left.



***I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.***  
**Martin Luther**

"A mighty fortress is our God  
 A bulwark never failing;  
 Our helper he, amid the flood  
 Of mortal ills prevailing.  
 For still our ancient foe  
 does seek to work us woe;  
 His craft and power are great;  
 And, armed with cruel hate,  
 On earth is not his equal.  
 "Did we in our own strength confide,  
 Our striving would be losing,  
 Were not the right man on our side,  
 The man of God's own choosing  
 Dost ask who that may be?  
 Christ Jesus, it is he,  
 Lord Sabaoth his name,  
 From age to age the same,  
 And he must win the battle.  
 "And though this world, with devils filled,  
 Should threaten to undo us;  
 We will not fear, for God has willed  
 His truth to triumph through us.  
 The prince of darkness grim,--  
 We tremble not for him;  
 His rage we can endure,  
 For lo! his doom is sure,--  
 One little word shall fell him.  
 "That word above all earthly powers--  
 No thanks to them--abideth;  
 The Spirit and the gifts are ours  
 Through him who with us sideth.  
 Let goods and kindred go,  
 This mortal life also;  
 The body they may kill:  
 God's truth abideth still,  
 His kingdom is forever."

Questions, comments, or want to join  
 a free class contact Mark at  
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**Covid got you down?  
 Martin Luther also experienced a  
 plague,  
 and this is what he did**

Luther is well-known as the guy who questioned certain practices of the Catholic Church in the 1500s. But he is not well-known for a "hobby" of his: music. As a matter of fact, when Luther was a young man, really a boy, he was sent from his parent's home to a school in another city. His parent's (at that time) were not wealthy people, and Luther had to work to help pay for room-and-board. He earned extra money by singing for tips in a street choir made up of boys. That's right, Luther was a member of a boy band! Fast forward to his adult years. Luther is married with children and deep into the events of the Reformation, which he kicked off years before. But in the year 1527, a plague came to Luther's hometown, Wittenberg. Luther could have fled; yet he and his wife, Katie, decided to stay in Wittenberg and care for those who had the plague. By doing so, Luther and his wife knew they were imperiling their own lives. As a matter of fact, their house became quarantined because of the sick people there. Luther responded by writing a song (words and music) that reflected his feeling of total dependence on God's grace to keep him alive. That song is "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

The song is on the left side (as translated from the German). (Luther wrote other songs, but this is by far his best known.)

**Interested in seeing  
 past Church History  
 newsletters? Go here.**

**Upcoming free online classes:  
 --Oct 25 - Dec 19:  
 Overview/Review of the New  
 Testament  
 ---More info? go here**