



## God the Father, Be Our Stay

**Text: Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

**Tune: Unknown; 14th century melody**

As was the case with several of Martin Luther's hymns, he took existing hymns which the people knew and adapted them to be in accord with what Scripture teaches. This kind of adapting and improving happened frequently in the Reformation. "God the Father, Be Our Stay" is one such case of Luther's adapting of existing texts.



Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483 in Eisleben, the son of Hans and Margarete. After receiving his education at Magdeburg, Eisenach, and Erfut, eventually earning a Master's Degree in 1505, he entered the Augustinian Convent at Erfurt and was ordained in 1507. In 1508 he began to lecture at the University of Wittenberg, and received his Doctor of Theology in 1512. His most infamous event, the nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Wittenberg's Castle Church, occurred October 31, 1517, counted as the official beginning of the Reformation.

Though he attracted many enemies, his writing of *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), a document analyzing the Sacraments under the Roman Catholic Church, earned his excommunication. Luther's hymnwriting began in 1523 when he wrote a song commemorating the first Lutheran martyrs, a style of writing which became the foundation for the Lutheran hymn. Luther continued teaching, much writing of theological works, and preaching until his death, February 18, 1546.

"God the Father, Be Our Stay" was one of Luther's earlier hymns. He made this adaptation in 1524, and it was first printed in 1525. This hymn of invocation of the Holy Trinity is patterned after medieval pilgrim songs which invoked the aid of the saints. Hymns that started, "St. Peter, be our stay," "Dear St. Nicholas, be our stay," or "St. Mary, be our stay" were well known in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Both words and music of such hymns to the saints can easily be found in pre-Reformation sources. The melody was so well-known that when "God the Father, Be Our Stay" was published in 1525 in the Erfurt *Enchiridion*, it was published without music. Luther kept the first five lines of the text with only minor changes, replacing the appeal to the saints with an invocation of the three Persons of the Trinity. He also made a few minor changes to the conclusion of the hymn. His adaptation became so popular, that even a Catholic hymnal published in 1537 included Luther's version alongside the previous version.



This hymn has remained popular in Lutheranism. Though Luther originally thought it a very fitting hymn for Trinity and the Trinity season, it soon became a favorite for weddings. Later versions shortened the hymn. Instead of singing the hymn three times, each time addressing a different Person of the Trinity, it was sung once singing "Triune God, be Thou our stay" instead of each Person.

This hymn is an excellent prayer for us to pray at all times, especially in times of distress or evil. We implore our Triune God to keep us from perishing eternally. He does this by cleansing us from our sins by Jesus' Blood. Thus forgiven, we ask for our faith to be created and strengthened in the face of the Evil One. Though Satan would try to get us to doubt God, we pray for grace to trust God solely. He equips us for battle against the Evil One by giving us His armor and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word. Finally, we ask to be kept in the true Church, "with all true Christians running our heavenly race." God will grant this for Jesus' sake, and we will spend eternity singing our hallelujahs to Him.