A Reformation Timeline

The world was changing. New scientific discoveries had opened pathways for understanding more about our complex universe. The ocean, once feared for its danger and depth, was tamed for travel and trade. Peasants and workers, laboring under harsh and relentless conditions, sought revolution. The bubonic plague had claimed the lives of about 75 million people from 1347 to 1351. It continued to reappear and panic European cities. Political alliances, long forged between pope and prince, fractured as power centers shifted. Gutenberg’s press (1455), the first to use moveable type, transported ideas from one person to the next with swiftness and ease. As the medieval era collapsed into the modern, changes seemed everywhere and limitless.

Yet even during these changing times one thing remained constant: our God, who grants forgiveness and grace to His people through Jesus Christ. Despite advances and transformations in science and society, politics and publication, God was working. He gave hope and life by His Spirit through Word and Sacraments. He bestowed comfort and joy in trying and often perilous situations. In changing times, His promises through His Son did not change, nor will they ever. They will never be altered, nor revoked. His Word pronounces us righteous through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. He alone is our Life and our Peace.

The following Reformation Timeline has been provided to aid you in reading Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions. Significant people and events in the “Old World” as well as the “New” have been included for the years 1436 to 1600. Additional references include scientific discoveries, substantive works of art, and the arrivals of European explorers to the Americas. Items in bold indicate writings and events specifically relating to the Lutheran Confessions.

This timeline confirms what we know by experience: change will take place. But in changing times God’s Word reminds us that He is always faithful to His people. With hearty confidence and trust we can say with King David, “My times are in Your hands” (Psalm 31:15).
— 1400 —
1436 John Gutenberg invents movable-type printing press
1440 Leif Eriksson draws first known map of America
1448 Portuguese establish first trading post in Africa
1449 Lorenzo de Medici born, January 1

— 1450 —
1450 Portuguese bring African slaves to Cape Verde Islands
Inca Empire flourishes in Peru
1451 The Vatican Library founded
Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa orders Jews in the Netherlands to wear identification badges
1452 Leonardo da Vinci born, April 15
1453 Constantinople falls to the Turks
1455 Gutenberg Bible printed
1456 Pope sees comet; calls for prayer against “The Devil, the Turk, and the Comet”
1457 King James II of Scotland bans football (soccer) and golf for distracting young men from combat training
1459 Jacob Fugger, Imperial banker, born, March 6
1463 Frederick the Wise born, January 17
1465 Johann Staupitz born
1466 Erasmus born
1468 John the Steadfast born, June 30
1472 Lucas Cranach the Elder born in Kronach, Oberfranken
1473 Copernicus is born, February 19

— 1475 —
1475 Michelangelo born, March 6
1481 Spanish Inquisition against Jews, Muslims, and heretics begins
1483 Raphael, artist, born, April 16
Martin Luther born in Eisleben, November 10; baptized November 11
Nicholas Amsdorf born, December 3
Ulrich Zwingli born, January 1
Papal bull condemns witchcraft; inquisitors sent to Germany
1485 John Bugenhagen born at Wellin, Pomerania, June 24
Gregory Brück born at Belzig
Botticelli paints The Birth of Venus
1486 John Eck born, November 13
1487 Diaz sails around the Cape of Good Hope
1492 Columbus reaches the Americas
First lead pencils used
Corn discovered by Columbus
First known reference to tobacco
Ferdinand and Isabella expel 100,000 Jews from Spain
1493 Justas Jonas born in Nordhausen, June 5
Pope divides discoveries in the New World between Spain and Portugal
1494 Charles VIII of France invades Italy
Sulayman the Magnificent born, November 6
Earliest report of Scots making whiskey
1495 Da Vinci begins painting Last Supper; completed 1497
William Tyndale born in Slymbridge, England
1496 Michelangelo begins sculpting Pieta
Santo Domingo founded in New World
Pope Alexander VI gives his son as hostage to Charles VIII of France
1497 Philip Melanchthon born, February 16
Copernicus makes first recorded European astronomical observations, March 9
Dürer publishes Apocalypse woodcuts
Hans Holbein the Younger, artist, born in Augsburg
Savonarola hanged in Florence, May 23
John Cabot discovers Newfoundland

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1498 Vasco de Gama reaches India
Toothbrush invented

1499 Katherina von Bora born in Lippe-
dorf, January 29
John Brentz born in Weil, Württem-
berg, June 24
Louis XII of France seizes Milan

— 1500 —

1500 Charles V born in Ghent, February 24
Pope Alexander VI proclaims Jubilee
Year; calls for crusade against Turks
Aldus Manutius, Italian printer who
founded the Venice Academy for the
study of Greek classics and invented
Italic type, born
World population estimated at 400 mil-
lion, 100 million in Europe and Russia

1501 Luther enters University of Erfurt
(receives Master of Arts in philosophy, 1505)

1502 Michelangelo begins sculpting David
Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony,
founds University of Wittenberg
First portable timepiece created in
Nürnberg

1503 John Frederick the Magnanimous born
at Torgau, June 30

1503 Da Vinci begins painting the Mona Lisa

1504 Philip of Hesse born in Marburg,
November 13

1505 Luther in thunderstorm, July 2; enters
monastery, July 17

1506 Pope Julius II lays cornerstone of St.
Peter’s Basilica, Rome
Luther takes final vows as Augustinian
Monk, autumn

1507 Luther ordained priest at Erfurt
Cathedral, April 3
Luther celebrates first Mass, May 2;
begins study of theology

1508 Michelangelo begins painting Sistine
Chapel; completed 1512
Luther appointed substitute lecturer
in moral philosophy at University of
Wittenberg

1509 John Calvin born in Noyon, France,
July 10
Luther obtains Bachelor of Theology
degree, March 9; returns to Erfurt
Henry VIII becomes king of England
Pope Julius II excommunicates the city
of Venice

— 1510 —

1510 First African slaves brought to the New
World (Haiti)
Luther sent to Rome on mission for
Augustinian order
Wheelock firearm introduced in
Nürnberg, Germany

1511 Luther sent to Wittenberg University to
serve as professor, takes over chair of
Staupitz at Wittenberg

1512 Luther awarded Doctor of Theology
degree, October 18–19
Fifth Lateran Council begins; ends in 1517

1513 Ponce de Leon reaches Florida
Portuguese explorers reach China
Balboa reaches Pacific Ocean
Pope Leo X begins pontificate, March 11
Luther’s “tower experience,” spring
Luther begins lectures on Psalms

1514 Albert of Brandenburg, cardinal, Arch-
bishop of Mainz, and elector, begins
his reign

1515 Luther begins lectures on Romans
Index of Prohibited Books adopted at
Fifth Lateran Council
Coffee from Arabia appears in Europe

1516 Erasmus publishes Novum Instrumen-
tum, first Greek New Testament
Luther begins first lecture series on
Galatians
Reinheitsgebot law enacted in Bavaria
to assure pure beer