

## William the Silent (1533-1584)



William was the eldest son of Count Nassau in Germany and he was born in April, 1533. His parents were Christians and taught him about Martin Luther. Luther was a good man who told people to read the Bible. He said that the Catholics were wrong to say that people needed to give the priests money to get into heaven. When he grew up, William's cousin said that he could become the Prince of Orange, if he became a Catholic. So he did. But he could never forget what his parents had taught him.

As the Prince of Orange he owned a lot of land in the Netherlands which was ruled by Charles V.

Charles V was a Catholic and did not want anyone in the lands he ruled to be told what the Bible says. He wanted them all to be Catholics like himself. Charles took a liking to William and shared his secret plans with him. He taught William to speak in different languages and gave him a good education.

Suddenly, Charles decided to stop being king and his son Philip II became king instead. Philip also hated the wise ideas of Luther and he did not trust William. William saw that Philip II was a cruel king.

In 1559, William was sent to France and he was out hunting one day with the King of France, Henry II. Henry began talking to William about a plot that he and Philip II had to kill all of the Christians who followed Luther. Henry thought that William knew all about the plot and William decided not to tell him that he didn't. This is why he got the name 'William the silent'. Henry went on talking and William learnt all about the plot. William decided that he would stop these wicked kings' plans. He loved the people of the Netherlands. As soon as he could, William told the leaders of the lands ruled by Philip II about the plot. Philip never found out who had spoilt his plans.

Although William had become a Catholic, he didn't think it was fair to treat people cruelly if they didn't want to be Catholics. He wanted to help the Dutch to fight this evil plot. He tried his best to stop the plan from taking place, but he could not. So he

went back to his home town to think. While he was there, he decided that he would be on God's side and fight for the Christians who were being cruelly treated. It was a long battle and to begin with it looked as if he was losing. But then, the Sea Beggars, a group of Dutch sailors who spent their time raiding Spanish treasure ships, helped him. They knew all about the canals, swamps, marshes and dykes and were very brave. They helped the Dutch to become rulers of the sea.

Very slowly, the Spanish were overcome and the fighting stopped. William was never cruel to those he was against. He wanted freedom for everyone to believe what they thought was right, without being cruel to those who thought differently. He allowed them to continue being Catholics while the Christians were allowed to follow Luther's teachings. Philip II was not pleased. He said bad things about William and offered a reward to anyone who could kill him. Eventually a wicked man thought of a plan and found a way to kill him. As William died, he was heard praying: 'May God, have mercy on my soul and on my poor people.'