

July 25th

Memory verse:

The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven:

the lightnings lightened the world:

the earth trembled and shook. Psalm 77:18

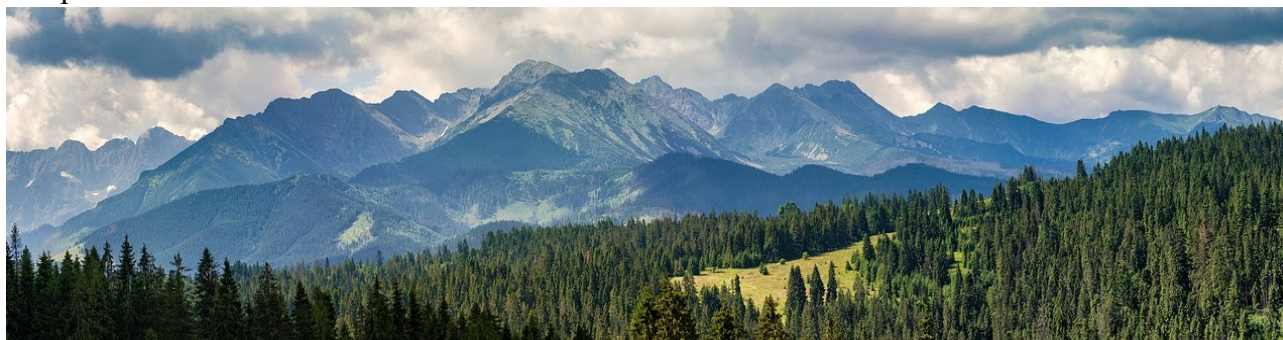
Younger children can learn the words in bold. There is a hymn with thunder in it in today's lesson!

More about today's memory verse in tomorrow's lesson.

Something to sing¹

Do you know the hymn, “How Great Thou Art”? Hymns often have a complex history and this hymn is no exception. Missionary Stuart W. K. Hine (born on 25th July, 1899) was responsible for the familiar English translation but that is only part of the story. In fact it is an English translation of a Russian translation of a Germany translation of a Swedish hymn! The original poem “O store Gud” by Swedish Pastor Carl Boberg (1859-1940) was published in a Swedish Christian magazine in 1886. Pastor Bomberg set the words to a Swedish folk tune. A German translation, “*Wie gross bist Du,*” followed in 1907 by Manfred von Glehn (1867-1924) who lived in Estonia where his father had lands. This in turn was translated into Russian by Ivan Prokhanoff (1869-1935)² as “*Как Ты велик*” – “*Kak ti belik.*”

Pastor Carl Boberg was inspired to write the now famous hymn when he was caught in a sudden thunderstorm on the South East coast of Sweden. It was a midday storm and the thunder and lightening were followed by clear sunshine and a beautiful rainbow. After the storm the birds in the nearby trees began singing. The effect was so awe-inspiring that Pastor Boberg knelt down to pray and praise his God.



Mr and Mrs Hine came across the hymn in the Russian translation by Ivan Prokahnov when doing evangelistic work in the Carpathian Mountains. Here they too experienced the grandeur of a storm which inspired the translation.

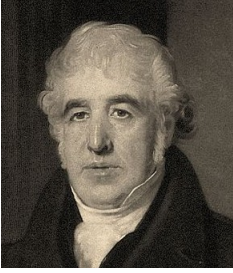
The fourth verse is the original work of Mr Hine, written after his return to Britain and added after the Second World War. The Hines worked with Polish refugees in Britain during the war who were longing to go home. It is this homesickness that partly inspired the words of the verse. The original version of the English translation is included in the Optional Resources files for today and the tune is widely available.

The picture shows the Carpathian Mountains. Can you find them in your Atlas?

1 Information from Cliff Knight, (Gwent, 1993) *A Companion to Christian Hymns* p. 235 and other sources.

2 See the lesson for April 17th.

A useful invention!



Charles Macintosh (1766 – 1843) died on 25th July. He began his working life as a clerk but he spent his spare time studying science, especially chemistry. Before he reached the age of 20, he gave up his job and began to earn a good living by manufacturing chemicals. He experimented with a chemical distilled from coal tar called naphtha and discovered it would dissolve rubber. He used this to prepare a waterproof fabric by cementing together two layers of cloth with the rubber solution. No longer did being out in a thunderstorm mean getting soaked to the skin: the Mackintosh was born!

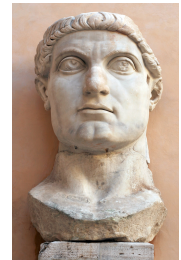
Modern waterproof clothing is no longer made in the same way, of course, but the Mackintosh, or mac, was a revolutionary idea and a great improvement in the life of people who had to work outdoors. Sir Arthur Percival Heywood, (1849-1916) was the pioneer of 15 inch gauge steam railways for the park and farmland attached to the grand houses of wealthy landowners. He noted, “Cabs on such small engines are to be avoided.... A stout mackintosh is cheaper and far better for the driver.”³ Just imagine life without any waterproof clothing! How much more difficult (and much less fun) hill walking, cycling and a host of other outdoor activities would be if we had no waterproof mac or cagoule. What is the weather like today? Be determined! Even if it is raining put on your mackintosh and go for a walk!



Something to read from history⁴

On 25th July 306AD at York, Constantine I was proclaimed Roman Emperor by his troops.

Constantine was an energetic emperor who enacted many reforms, restructuring the government and the army and combatting monetary inflation with new coinage. He strengthened the Roman Empire and resettled areas that had been abandoned by the Romans during the difficult times of the 3rd Century. However, the most intriguing aspect of Constantine's reign relates to his relationship with Christianity.



Since the times of the apostles Christianity had been persecuted by the government of the Roman Empire. Sometimes the persecution was intense as under Diocletian (reigned 284-385AD). At other times things were less harsh as under Gallienus (reigned 253–268AD). Conditions also varied from place to place depending on the attitude of local officials. Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to promote Christianity in his Empire and even embrace it himself – but was he really a Christian?

The most well-known legend about Constantine the Great involves the sign you see on the right which is called the *chi-rho*, because it is made up of the Greek letters chi (*X*) and rho (*P*). These are the first two letters of *XPICTOC* (Christos) the Greek word for Christ.



Upon his father's death on July 25, 306 AD, Constantine's troops did indeed proclaim him Caesar but he was not the only person with a claim to the imperial throne. In 285, Emperor Diocletian had

³ Sir Arthur Percival Heywood, Bart., M.A., *Minimum Gauge Railways: Their Application, Construction and Working* (1894)

⁴ Information from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Constantine-the-Great.html> and other sources. Illustration: By Camille King from Toronto, Canada - constantine's head at capitoline, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=91509763>

established a Tetrarchy. This gave four men rule over a quarter of the Roman Empire each. There were two senior emperors and two non-hereditary junior emperors. This set the stage for conflict in the future. Constantine's father, Constantius had been one of the senior emperors. Constantine's most powerful rivals for his father's position were Maximian and his son, Maxentius, who seized control of Italy, Roman Africa, Sardinia, and Corsica. Constantine raised a large army in Britain and set off for Rome to defeat Maximian.

Constantine's army was outnumbered by that of Maximian by four to one. The story goes that before the battle, Constantine saw a vision, of the symbol depicted on the previous page, telling him, *ἐν τούτῳ νίκα* or *In hoc signo vinces* "In this sign thou shalt conquer." In some versions of the story it is not the *chi-rho* but the cross which Constantine saw. Constantine obeyed the vision, having the sign put on his soldiers' shields. He defeated his rival at the Battle of Pons Milvius (312AD) despite being out-numbered.

Constantine's other major rival was Valerius Licinianus Licinius (c. 265 – 325) who was co-Emperor with him at the time. United, despite their rivalry against Maximian and Maxentius, they issued the Edict of Milan (313AD) together on the occasion of Licinius's marriage to Constantine's sister. This edict ended official persecution of Christians by declaring complete religious toleration throughout the Empire. Constantine himself continued many pagan practices, including veneration of the sun. He retained the old pagan gods on the Roman coins and he kept for himself the old pagan title of *Pontifex Maximus*. It seems likely that political expediency led him to adopt Christianity and unite his empire by persecuting none of his subjects on religious grounds. Perhaps he recognised the moral principles of Christianity would be good for people and strengthen the Empire.

Constantine eventually defeated Licinius and took control of the whole Roman Empire. He spent money on the construction of lavish church buildings and began to openly identify himself as "Christian." During his reign, controversy arose over the teachings of Arius (250 or 256–336). As far as we can tell, Arius taught a faulty view of the Trinity, saying that Jesus did not always exist. Right down to the present day the ideas that oppose the Trinity are called the heresy of Arianism after him. Constantine called a Council, the Council of Nicaea (325AD) for the question to be discussed and Arianism was declared heresy. Constantine called together the council in his role as Emperor. At first he did not even understand the issue at stake. His concern was that division in the church caused instability in the Empire.

Although the decision reached at the council was correct,⁵ a council called by the Emperor was not the right way to come to such a decision. Christians do not rely on the decisions of church councils or the creeds that they formulate to determine what they should or should not believe. The Bible alone is our standard. From the Council of Nicaea began the practice of calling councils to decide points of doctrine and the use of the secular power of the Empire to enforce them. Now there was a final authority being set up for Christians apart from God's written Word. An Imperial State Church was emerging that would persecute any Christians who, looking to God's Word alone for guidance, questioned its teachings or practices.

Later in his reign Constantine leaned towards Arianism himself and his son who followed him as emperor was an Arian who reversed the work of the Council of Nicaea. The findings of the Council of Nicaea are summarised in the Nicene Creed which many Christian like to learn off by heart. I have included this Creed in today's optional resources so you can try this for yourselves if you want to.

5 See lesson for 7th November for more on the Council of Nicaea and its decision.



For information on Constantinople, modern day Istanbul (pictured above), the city Constantine founded as the new capital of the Roman Empire, see the lessons for 29th May.