

20th March

Memory verse:

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude,
and as the voice of many waters,
and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying,

Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Revelation 19:6¹

A story to read from history



On **20th March** 1616, Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618) was freed from the Tower of London after 13 years of imprisonment. He had rooms in the Garden Tower which, as you can see from the picture, were well furnished and spacious – for a prison.² Here he lived with his wife and servants, conducting scientific experiments and writing his *History of the World* until the king released him on certain conditions. These were that he should conduct another expedition to Venezuela in search of *El Dorado* the legendary land of gold.

Raleigh had been a favourite of Queen Elizabeth (although even she had him in the Tower for a time for marrying one of her ladies in waiting!) but her successor James I, hated Raleigh. His eldest son, the popular Prince Henry³ loved him, however, and pleaded with his father on Raleigh's behalf.

Raleigh had played a part with Drake in the defeat of the Spanish Armada, had taken part in the capture of the Spanish town of Cádiz and the settlements he had founded in the New World had been intended by the Queen as bases from which ships could raid the Spanish treasure fleet.

James had a different view of Spain to his predecessor, trying to present himself as a mediator in European affairs by marrying one of his children to a Protestant statesman Frederick, Elector of the Palatine and another to a Catholic Spanish princess. Raleigh, the enemy of Spain, was thus out of favour with the king. He was imprisoned for involvement in a plot to assassinate the king although it was never proved that he had anything to do with it. One of the judges at his trial is said to have said afterwards: “The justice of England has never been so degraded and injured as by the condemnation of the honourable Sir Walter Raleigh.”

Greedy James released Raleigh on **20th March** 1616 with the idea of making money from the discovery of the riches of *El Dorado* – if it existed.

The voyage was a disaster. There was no *El Dorado* to be found. A condition imposed by the king was that he should strictly avoid any attack on Spanish shipping or possessions in the New World. A detachment of his men disobeyed this order without Raleigh's knowledge. Raleigh's son was killed in this attack on Santo Tomé de Guayana and when the unsuccessful and grieving Raleigh arrived home, the furious Spanish ambassador pressed the king for his execution.

You might consider this a very sad tale but here is what the great story-writer John Buchan wrote about him:

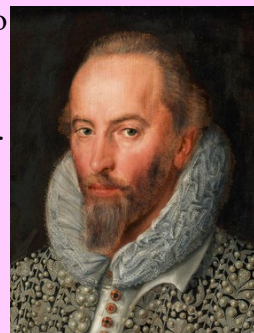
¹ See lesson for 23rd March for tips on learning this verse.

² By Kjetil Bjørnsrud - Own work, CC BY 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=781869>

³ More about Prince Henry in the lesson for 19th February. (Yet to come.)

His story, if we look at it one way, is a tragedy, for all his ventures seemed to fail, and after weary years in prison he died on the scaffold. But, properly considered, it is a happy tale, for he never lost heart, and disaster never conquered his courage. He sowed the seed which bore fruit long after his time.

It was the example and the teaching of Raleigh that first set our people forming colonies in new lands. The British Empire of to-day,⁴ and the Republic of the United States, are alike built on his dreams. So you see that after all he fulfilled the purpose of his life, and gave to the English... “a better Indies than the King of Spain’s.”



Recommended reading for older children:

Sir Walter Raleigh by Sir John Buchan, (Thomas Nelson, 1911) is an excellent, informative and appealing blend of biography and historical fiction written originally for a young boy. Each chapter moves the story on but is told as a stand alone adventure narrated by a different fictional character. I have included Jacques Pommerol's tale “The Kings' Path” in today's Optional Resources file as a taster. The book is available second hand on Amazon for around £8. It is also included in full on *The Mothers' Companion* flashdrive.⁵

A poem to read⁶

The Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso (usually called just “Ovid”) (43-17/18BC) was born on **20th March**. His most famous poem *Metamorphoses* is a retelling of the various classical myths, beginning with creation. This is how it starts:



Before the ocean and the earth appeared—
before the skies had overspread them all—
the face of Nature in a vast expanse
was naught but Chaos uniformly waste.
It was a rude and undeveloped mass,
that nothing made except a ponderous weight;
and all discordant elements confused,
were there congested in a shapeless heap.
As yet the sun afforded earth no light,
nor did the moon renew her crescent horns;
the earth was not suspended in the air
exactly balanced by her heavy weight....

But God, or kindly Nature, ended strife—
he cut the land from skies, the sea from land,
the heavens ethereal from material air;
and when were all evolved from that dark mass
he bound the fractious parts in tranquil peace.
The fiery element of convex heaven
leaped from the mass devoid of dragging weight,
and chose the summit arch to which the air
as next in quality was next in place....

4 Buchan was writing in 1911.

5 Available from <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com/>

6 Image [Lucasaw](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

And when this God—which one is yet unknown—
had carved asunder that discordant mass,
had thus reduced it to its elements,
that every part should equally combine,
when time began He rounded out the earth
and moulded it to form a mighty globe.
Then poured He forth the deeps and gave command
that they should billow in the rapid winds,
that they should compass every shore of earth....

But one more perfect and more sanctified,
a being capable of lofty thought,
intelligent to rule, was wanting still.
Man was created! Did the Unknown God
designing then a better world make man
of seed divine? or did Prometheus
take the new soil of earth (that still contained
some godly element of Heaven's Life)
and use it to create the race of man;
first mingling it with water of new streams;
so that his new creation, upright man,
was made in image of commanding Gods?
On earth the brute creation bends its gaze,
but man was given a lofty countenance
and was commanded to behold the skies;
and with an upright face may view the stars:—
and so it was that shapeless clay put on
the form of man till then unknown to earth.⁷

If you think this reads rather like a jumbled, distorted version of what we read in the Bible in Genesis – you are right! If you read the whole of the first book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*⁸ you will find things that remind you, in a strange way, not only of the creation but of the fall of man and the Flood of Noah's day as well. Where did Ovid gather his material? He did not have a Bible, did he?

Ovid was working from various sources, sources that went back ultimately through oral traditions to the Tower of Babel where all the world's people groups were spread out over the earth. One generation retold the tales of the past to the next. They embroidered them too and they made them fit with their made-up notions of a whole pantheon of gods.

If you did the lesson for 22nd February you might have played Chinese whispers. If so, you will understand that it does not take very long for things to alter as they are passed down. In fact the surprising thing is that by Ovid's day anything recognisable was left at all! Scholar's who believe the Bible differ a little in the dates they come up with for the Tower of Babel but 1964BC⁹ is often considered to be the latest possible date. Ovid was born in 43BC over one thousand nine hundred years later. That is a very long Chinese whisper!

7 English blank verse translation by Brookes More (New Hampshire, 1921)

8 Here, for instance <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106014570292&view=1up&seq=11&skin=2021>

9 https://creation.com/images/pdfs/tj/j31_1/J31_1_80-87.pdf

What a blessing it is that God in His mercy did not leave us without His written Word. We do not have to rely on word of mouth to find out the truth about sin, death, judgement and salvation. Psalm 12 tells us:

The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt **keep them**, O LORD, thou shalt **preserve them** from this generation **for ever**.

If you want to use Ovid's lines in the translation given here as practice for reading aloud, remember that when reading poetry it is best not to emphasise the metre but just to read it as if it were prose. This works well even with blank (non-rhyming) verse as here. If you read it with expression the metre will take care of itself.

A precious old book and a sad meeting: two snippets from Christian history

We have just been thinking about how man's disobedience caused God to confuse the languages of men. This confusion means we now have to work hard to understand each other if we come from a different language group. It is even harder if we want to read something written long ago in a language no longer spoken. Translators who have studied to understand another language have a vital skill and today is the anniversary of the death of a particularly interesting translator.

Mary Basset, (c. 1523 –1572) granddaughter of Sir Thomas More,¹⁰ was a translator of exceptional talent. She died on **20th March** 1572. Many of the books she translated have now been lost but her translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* now survives in just one manuscript copy in the British Library. This book she translated from Greek into English and also into Latin. Eusebius lived in the fourth century and this is why his book is so important. Eusebius gives a chronological account of the life of the church going right back to the first century. He is one of the earliest witnesses we have of how the gospel spread in the days after the death of the apostles. Writing of events which took place in the second century, for instance, he relates that many of the disciples at that time

...whose souls were inflamed by the Divine Word and with a more ardent desire of wisdom, first fulfilled our Saviour's commandment by distributing their substance to those that were necessitous; then after that, travelling abroad, they performed the work of evangelists to those who had not yet at all heard the word of faith, being very ambitious to preach Christ and to deliver the books of the Divine Gospels. And these persons, having only laid the foundations of faith in remote and barbarous places and constituted other pastors, committed to them the culture of those they had perfectly introduced to the faith, and departed again to other regions.¹¹

Are you learning an ancient language such as Latin or a modern one such as French? Keep at it! Being able to translate from one language to another is a wonderful skill that will enable you to spread information to others that might otherwise be hidden from them through the language in which it is written. Best of all we can pass on the Gospel to others through translation work.

In 1672 a Synod (meeting of church leaders) took place. It was called together by Dositheus II Notaras Patriarch of Jerusalem (1641 – 1707) and took place in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. For these reasons it is sometimes referred to as the Synod of Jerusalem and sometimes as the synod of Bethlehem. The acts of the synod are dated **20th March**. They form a very sorry document as we shall see. But first: why was the synod called? It was called to refute the ideas of a brilliant man, Cyril Lucas or Lucaris or Loukaris (1572-1638), who had written a book which the members of the synod did not like at all.

¹⁰ You can read about him in the lesson for 17th April.

¹¹ As quoted in Broadbent *the Pilgrim Church* (1931) p.62.



In the time of the great reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, the Greek Orthodox Church differed from the Roman Catholic Church in that it had not gone through any experience such as the Reformation. However, an attempt to introduce the principles of the Reformation into it was made, and it was made in the highest quarters. Cyril Lucas (1572-1638), a native of Crete, was known as the most learned man of his day. He was made successively Patriarch of Alexandria (1602) and Patriarch of Constantinople (1621). These were all high offices in the Greek Orthodox church. It was he who discovered in a monastery on Mount Athos in Greece, a fifth century M.S. which was then the oldest Greek Bible known. He sent it from Alexandria to Charles I, King of England, and it is in the British Museum to this day, known as the *Codex Alexandrinus*.

While still Patriarch of Alexandria Cyril began a careful comparison of the doctrines of the Greek, Roman and Reformed churches with the Scriptures and decided to leave the old Church Fathers, and accept the Scriptures as his guide. Finding the teaching of the Reformers more in accordance with the Scriptures than those of the Greek Orthodox or Roman Catholic churches he published a “Confession” in which he declared himself in many respects one with the Reformers.

“I can no longer endure”, he said, “to hear a man say that the comments of human tradition are of equal weight with Holy Scripture.” He vigorously denounced the doctrine of transubstantiation¹² and the worship of images. He taught that the one true Catholic Church must include all the faithful in Christ, but, he said, there are visible churches in different places and at different times; these are capable of error and the Holy Scriptures are given as an infallible guide and authority to which we must always return; so he commended the constant study of Scripture, which the Holy Spirit will enable those who are born again to understand as they compare one part of it with another.

Such teachings coming from such a person caused great discussion, and Cyril Lucas was involved in strenuous conflict. Five times he was banished and as often recalled. The Sultan's Grand Vizier trusted and supported him, but this, while enabling him to keep his position, injured his testimony, as it was felt to be strange and unsuitable that a Christian teacher should depend for support on a Islamic politician.

So the Synod of the Greek Church was held in Bethlehem in 1672 to refute Lucas's ideas. A general confirmation of the old teachings of the Orthodox Church was reached, and reformation was said to be unnecessary. But the most effective opposition to this Greek Reformer came from the Roman Catholic Church. A reformation in the Eastern Orthodox church would have been a further threat to Catholicism. If a reformed group arose it would perhaps unite with the Protestants in the west and further undermine the catholic church. So Jesuit¹³ plots repeatedly hindered Lucas's work, and at last by misrepresenting him in his absence to the Sultan Amurath, as the Sultan was marching on Bagdad, they obtained a hasty order for his death. He was strangled with a bowstring in Constantinople and his body cast into the sea. After his death Synod after Synod condemned his doctrines.¹⁴

12 The idea that the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ and that the “mass” is a sacrifice.

13 Jesuits are a catholic order focused on combatting Protestantism.

14 Adapted from Broadbent *the Pilgrim Church* (1931) p.301.

Notice the importance of the British Library in both these stories. Libraries have an important role to play in preserving precious documents. It is also true that it is sometimes difficult to know what books and documents will be precious and useful in the future. Take care of your own library – your personal collection of books is a library – who knows which of your books will be of use in the future! What is the oldest book in your house? Can you find out?