

15^h November

Memory Verse:

Nevertheless we,
according to his promise,
look for new heavens and a new earth,
wherein dwelleth righteousness.

2 Peter 3:13

The Apostle Peter has been explaining that this present world is not our home. One day “the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” he writes. Then he explains, in the words of our memory verse, what God has promised to his children. “Look for” is more like “look forward to” than “search for” and younger children may need to have “dwelleth” (“lives”) explained.

A story from history

John Amos Comenius (1592 – 1670), Czech national hero and an outstanding Christian, died on **15th November**, in the Netherlands, an exile from his homeland. Every child who learns to read should be grateful to Comenius. He was the originator of the idea of using pictures in children's reading books – although the language in which his pupils were learning to read was not their own but Latin.

In the lesson for 21st June we learned about the Battle of the White Mountain near Prague. This was the battle in which the Protestant defenders of Bohemia, the Hussites, were defeated by the Roman Catholic Emperor Ferdinand II. The Hussites were called after John Hus (c.1372-1415) the Bohemian Reformer.

Here is how Edmund Hamer Broadbent¹ describes what happened next when the Emperor's victorious troops stormed through Bohemia:

Murder and violence of every kind were let loose on the land. Thirty-six thousand families left Bohemia and Moravia, the population of Bohemia being reduced from three millions to one [million]. Thus, the Hussite religion and Bohemian independence disappeared together. Over large parts of Europe the Thirty Years War had begun its devastating course.

Jan Amos Comenius (b. 1592), known later the world over for his reform of education, is a heroic figure in this time of distress. He did not approve of the way in which the Brethren had engaged in politics and war. At the time of the great disaster he had only been three years settled as minister of the congregation of brethren at Fulneck in Moravia, and this place was sacked and destroyed by Spanish soldiers, compelling him to fly. He took refuge in the castle of Charles of Žerotín, where he became leader of the band of refugees that gathered there. While there he wrote a book, *The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart* in which, in allegorical form, he taught that peace is not to be found in the world, but in the indwelling of Christ in the heart. Driven from Žerotín, Comenius led the last band of fugitives from Moravia. He had lost everything. His wife and child died of the privations of the way.² As they said farewell to their native land, he encouraged their faith to believe that God would preserve there a “hidden seed” which would afterwards grow and bear fruit.

At last a resting place was found at Lissa (Les[z]no) in Poland (1628), where Comenius became Director of the School, and from whence he visited England (1641), being invited to re-organize education there. The Civil War in England drove him to further journeys, in

1 Extract from *The Pilgrim Church*. pp. 127-129. See the lesson for 28th June.

2 My Czech friend tells me that Comenius's first wife and children died of the plague.

Sweden and elsewhere. In 1656 a defeat of the Swedes by the Poles resulted in the burning of the “heretics' nest” in Lissa by the Poles, and Comenius again lost everything, including MSS [manuscripts] he had prepared for publication, the fruit of years of labour. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 had already destroyed the last hope of a re-establishment of the Bohemian Brethren, the Catholic and Protestant Powers alike refusing them any toleration. Under these circumstances of utter loss Comenius wrote, giving such counsel to the Brethren and to the world as exhibits the experience of the soul which continues to trust God when all earthly help has failed.... “Even you I cannot forget, [Comenius wrote] dear sisters, evangelical churches; nor thee our mother from whom we sprang, Roman Church. Thou wast a mother to us but art become a ... vampire who sucks the children's blood. Therefore, I wish that in thy misery thou mightest be converted to repentance and forsake the Babylon of thy blasphemy.... To all Christian assemblies together I bequeath my longing for unity and reconciliation, for union in faith and in love, for the Unity of the Spirit.... O that you might all be carried away by longing for the mercy of our God, the worthiness of Jesus and the delightful sweet inward gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are communicated through true faith, true love, and true hope in God. In this the nature of true Christianity is contained.”

The *Voice of Mourning* was written in 1660 in Amsterdam, Comenius' last dwelling place, where he died ten years later. In it he says: “We hear that the Lord heals only the wounded, gives life only to the dead, and redeems from hell only those [who are] cast down... (1 Sam. 2), then let us be willing for Him to do as He will with us, and if His will is first to wound us and slay us and cast us down... let His will be done; meantime, we expect that without fail, here or in eternity, we shall be healed, made alive again, and brought to heaven!... If the blood of the martyrs and also our blood shall be the seed of the Church for the increase later of those who fear God, ah, let us, weeping, scatter the precious seed that we may bring in the sheaves with rejoicing. God will not destroy without building again. He makes all things new. God knows what He is doing, we must trust Him to pull down and to build up as He will. He does not do these things for no purpose, something great lies hidden under it all. The whole Creation is subject to the will of God and we also, whether we understand what He does or not. He does not need our advice as to what He does.”

When he was 77 years of age and his fame was established throughout Europe as having revolutionized in the best sense the spirit and methods of teaching, Comenius wrote the *One Thing Needful*. He compares the world to a labyrinth, and shows that the way out is by leaving what is needless, and choosing the one thing needful—Christ....

“With the Bible in our hand,” [wrote Comenius “] we should cry: I believe what God has revealed in this Book; I will obediently keep His commands; I hope for that which He has promised. Christians, give ear! There is only one Life, but Death comes to us in a thousand forms. There is only one Truth, but Error has a thousand forms. There is only one Christ, but a thousand Antichrists.... So thou knowest, O Christendom, what is the one thing needful. Either thou turnest back to Christ or thou goest to destruction like the Antichrist. If thou art wise and wilt live, follow the Leader of Life.”

“God knows what He is doing, we must trust Him to pull down and to build up as He will.” What wise words these are for our own time as well as that of Comenius! Even a child can face circumstances that perplex or frighten. Remembering that God knows what He is doing and that, if we trust Him, it is for our good in the end is something a child can understand too. “There is only one Truth, but Error has a thousand forms...”. This too is very wise and can be demonstrated in a practical way to a child – just think of your arithmetic lessons! Jesus is the Way the *Truth* and the life! There is only one way and only one truth.



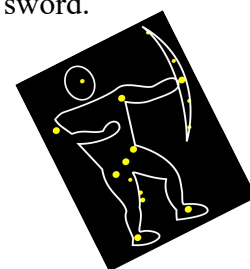
Above is a picture of Charles of Žerotín's chateau or castle as it is today. It is now a Comenius Museum.

Comenius picture method of learning to read is unusual. His book was called *Orbis Pictus* and it was translated into several languages. I have put the picture alphabet from this book in the Optional Resources files for today. Comenius selects an animal *noise* for each letter of the alphabet and asks the child to imagine the animal *making* the noise. It must have seemed a very revolutionary method in his time. If you have young brothers or sisters learning to read you might like to try it. Compare Comenius little pictures with those in a more recent reading book. Which do you prefer? What do you think of the size of type he has chosen for the words?

Something to do: Astronomy³



In November if the sky is clear you can wrap up warmly and do some stargazing. You do not need a telescope to learn to find the constellations in the sky. I think the easiest constellation to find is Orion and it is at its best around now. In the picture on the left can you see three bright stars in a line together near the centre slanting like this / ? That is Orion's belt. (You have to imagine Orion standing diagonally with his head towards the top left if the picture.) From his belt hangs his sword.



Can you see it in the picture? It is another line of stars below the belt that slants towards the bottom right of the picture. The little diagram shows you how it works. The yellow dots are the stars in the constellation – and the white lines are imaginary of course. Don't worry too much if you can't sort out the bow and all the other bits. If you can see the belt and sword in the sky you have got the constellation.

One of the world's greatest astronomers was born on **15th November**. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), was an older contemporary of Comenius. He nearly died of smallpox as a child and the illness left

³ Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today?* Book 3 available on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com/>

him a permanent invalid but he had a brilliant mind and his early work in astronomy gained him the friendship of Galileo and the Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe. These were two other great men who were working in the field of astronomy. Kepler worked for Tycho Brahe who was a very careful observer and gathered a huge amount of astronomical data. However, he kept his records secret and it was not until Tycho Brahe died that Kepler could see to them all. When Kepler was able to look at all Tycho Brahe's data he used his considerable mathematical abilities to work on it. Using this data he formulated his three laws of motion (see below).

Bible-believing scientists love Kepler's famous saying that as a scientist he was merely, "thinking God's thoughts after him." Even if he did not say it in exactly these words, this expresses the attitude of all those who explore science and who love the Creator. Like Comenius, Kepler had a hard life and suffered persecution for his faith.⁴

At this time there was much confusion between **astronomy** and **astrology**. Do you remember the difference between these two things from the lesson about Culpeper on 18th October? As an astronomer Kepler produced calendars or almanacs which not only showed the positions of the heavenly bodies but gave advice on when to plant crops, go fishing or engage in military operations. When to plant crops obviously depended on the seasons which are determined by **astronomical** factors. So does much fishing. Many people, even Christians, deduced that perhaps other things in their lives were affected by the stars and other heavenly bodies too.⁵ One of Kepler's great achievements was to sort out this problem. He carried on making calendars with advice of this type but decided to keep records and observe the results of the predictions in his calendars. These observations proved that **astrology** was *not* part of science and in 1601 Kepler published his findings: the stars do not guide human lives.

Something to find out

Kepler's great achievement was the formulation of his Three Laws of Planetary Motion:

First law: Each planet moves about the sun in an orbit that is an ellipse. The sun is at one focus of the ellipse.

Second law: The straight line joining a planet with the sun sweeps out equal areas in equal amounts of time. This means that the planet travels faster when it is closer to the sun.

Third law: The squares of the periods (p) of any two planets' revolutions are in the same ratio as the cubes of their mean distances from the sun (r). That is, $r_1^3 / r_2^3 = p_1^2 / p_2^2$

These three laws are progressively harder and harder to understand! Younger children can grasp the first law. They can find out what an ellipse is and what a focus of an ellipse is. Then they can try drawing an ellipse on a piece of corrugated cardboard using a loop of string round two foci such as map pins.⁶ Older children can look up the second and perhaps even the third law in a good junior physics text book.

4 You can read more of his life story here: <https://creation.com/johannes-kepler>

5 You will find an excellent explanation of the situation here: <https://creation.com/johannes-kepler> Much of the information in this lesson is drawn from this article.

6 As in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Et3OdzEGX_w