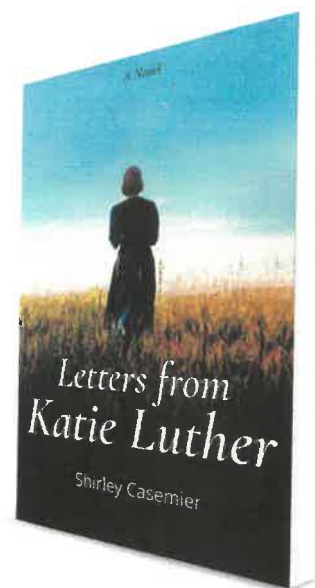


Letters From Katie Luther

by Shirley Casemier



Letters From Katie Luther: A Novel
by Shirley Casemier Jenison
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Chrysostom. Augustine. Martin Luther. John Calvin. John Knox. The list goes on. These are well-known names in the history of God's church. We learn about them in church history class. We read about them in Christian books and magazines. The King of kings, Jesus Christ, enabled these men to do remarkable things to protect his church and advance his kingdom.

But they were also normal people, weren't they? A man like Martin Luther may emerge from the pages of history almost larger than life, but did he ever get into an argument with his wife? Courageously he stood firm in his faith before princes and emperors, but did he ever doubt or even despair? The short answer is yes, of course, Luther was a normal child of God, full of weaknesses and at times full of frustrations as well. No one knew that better than his own dear wife, Katharina von Bora Luther, or Katie, as her husband called her.

In her novel, *Letters from Katie Luther*, Shirley Casemier gives us an intriguing literary glimpse into the Luther household. This easy-to-read book captures the readers' attention for several reasons. First, it is storytelling through letter writing. Although



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there are some sections of transitional narrative, the bulk of the book consists of a collection of fictional letters, crafted by Casemier, from Katie to her lifelong friend, Ave von Schoenfeld Axt. Anecdotes and emotions, crises and consolations all spill out of Katie's inkwell into her correspondence with her "Dear Ave." It makes for fascinating reading.

Second, snippets of church history are recounted through the eyes of a wife and mother. That gives a different perspective. During the Diet of Augsburg (1530), when Luther was away from home for months and staying in a castle of Coburg, Katie is left worrying about whether her husband will remember to take his medications and longing to go and comfort him when the news came that Luther's own father had died.

Third, although the author develops the personalities of Martin, Katie, and their children with some artistic "liberties" (p. 186), they all remain entirely believable. Martin Luther is an overworked preacher, pastor, and author, but he still knows how to have fun with kids, even when one of them hides the special hat of his academic regalia. Katie is the wife who loves her husband dearly but does not always agree with everything he does, especially in money matters.

This novel begins with Katie and a group of other nuns escaping from the Nimbschen convent in a fishmonger's wagon. They are brought to Martin Luther's large home, the Black Cloister. Shortly thereafter, Luther makes arrangements for all the nuns to return to their families or to live elsewhere. However, in the Lord's providence Katie eventually comes back, not as an escaped nun but as a newlywedded wife to the Reformer of Wittenberg himself!

The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to write, "Those who marry will face many troubles in this life" (1 Cor 7:28), and that truth did not make a detour around the Black Cloister. Martin and Katie got upset with each other, even gave each other the

silent treatment at times, but they also realized they had to forgive each other and step forward again, hand-in-hand. The Lord blessed their marriage with children, three boys and three girls, to be precise. What joy! However, the Lord also took two of their daughters into glory, one at just eight months and the other at thirteen years old. What heartache! Added to all this, they lived through wars, plagues, persecution, and poverty. It was not an easy life. Far from it.

Yet, time and again, the Lord protected and provided. He comforted the Luther household and surprised them with his providence. Yes, through it all they could sing praise to his name on their music evenings, which did not happen enough, due to all the busyness of their lives, but were thoroughly enjoyed whenever they did. Katie Luther shares it all with her cherished friend and sister in the Lord, Ave. Through these letters we also learn that the Lord blessed Martin Luther with a devoted and capable wife, his "Little Rib," as he called her. (How's that for a term of endearment?)

Has your literary appetite been whetted? Casemier's novel is well-written and easy to read. Older children can read it themselves, and children in elementary school may well enjoy having their parents read this story to them, chapter by chapter.

At the same time, adults will profit from reading this book as well. Those who take a more purist approach to church history might wish that the writer had stayed somewhat closer to the actual historical facts and chronologies. However, in the "Author's Note" at the end, Casemier explains what she changed and why she altered it. The artistic license is used respectfully and effectively. Moreover, the front cover clearly states that it is "A Novel."

I recommend this book warmly. It is nice to meet the human side of the reformers, even if it is crafted by the imagination of a modern author. 