

## Martin and Marie Dicke—Missionaries Serving the Lord in Papua New Guinea



### *Pestilence and ‘Now Thank We All Our God’*

By Martin Dicke

Watching the news of the dangers, growth, and spread of the Coronavirus gave new meaning to the petition in the special Litany prayer in our hymnal asking God to protect us from “pestilence and famine.”

Pestilence was nothing new hundreds of years ago. 1637 was a particularly difficult year for the Rev. Martin Rinckart and the people of the town of Eilenburg in Germany (see masthead above). He began to serve as a pastor in the town in 1617. The next year a war began which

lasted for three decades. During the war many thousands of people sought refuge within the walls of the city. In 1637 a severe plague hit the city and by the end of the year around 8,480 people had lost their lives. Among them was his own wife who passed away on May 8 of that year. By August he was the only pastor serving in the city and was sometimes leading funerals for 40-50 people at a time.

In the midst of this war, the pestilence and the famine that resulted, Rinckart wrote the words of the famous hymn “Now Thank We All Our God.”

It was published in a devotional book in 1636 where it was entitled “A Little Prayer Before Meals.” Upon the loss of his wife in the next year, the reference to mothers in the first verse must have meant even more to him and his children.

Below is a literal translation of the hymn from the original German. Even in midst of calamity and tragedy, Rinckart heeded Saint Paul’s admonition to “give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessaolnians 5:18). May God give us strength to do the same.

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1. Now let us all thank God with hearts, mouths, and hands, who does great things for us and all the ends of the earth. Who, while we were yet in our mother's womb and from childhood on, has greatly blessed us and does so to this day.
2. The eternal and bountiful God willingly grants us during our life an ever-cheerful heart and noble peace and holds us in His grace continually and delivers us from all affliction no matter where we are.
3. Glory, honor, and praise be to God, to the Father and to the Son and to the One, who is equal to both upon heaven’s throne on high – to the triune God, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be now and forevermore.



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