

Dear Friend

Today is the commemoration day of John and Charles Wesley. John Wesley was born in 1703 at Epworth Rectory, the fifteenth child of Samuel Wesley and his wife Susanna.



The rescue of the young John Wesley from the burning rectory. Mezzotint by [Samuel William Reynolds](#).

When John Wesley was five years old, he was rescued from a fire at the rectory, an incident that left an indelible impression on him. He was lifted out of a window by a parishioner standing on another man's shoulders. Wesley later used the phrase, "a brand plucked out of the fire", quoting Zechariah 3:2, to describe the incident.

In June 1720, Wesley entered Christ Church, Oxford. After graduating in 1724, Wesley stayed on at Christ Church to study for his master's degree.

He was ordained a deacon on 25 September 1725 and a priest on 22 September 1728, Wesley served as his father's [curate](#) for two years.

In the year of his ordination he read Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor, showed his interest in [mysticism](#), and began to seek the religious truths which underlay the great revival of the 18th century. The reading of [William Law's](#) *Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* gave him, he said, a more sublime view of the law of God; and he resolved to keep it, inwardly and outwardly, as sacredly as possible, believing that in obedience he would find salvation. He pursued a rigidly methodical and abstemious life, studied the Scriptures, and performed his religious duties diligently, depriving himself so that he would have alms to give. He began to seek after holiness of heart and life.

He went into residency in Oxford, as a Fellow of Lincoln College. There he joined his brother Charles and George Whitefield in the "Holy Club", a group of students who met together for private prayer and good works including visiting prisons and comforting the sick. In 1735 Wesley went to Georgia with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, but his personal faith was fragile. On board ship he encountered some Moravians whose calm faith in the face of a severe storm greatly impressed him. On his return to England in 1738, depressed by his lack of success in Georgia, Wesley sought them out and attended a service at Aldersgate on the evening of 24th May. Wesley recounted his experience in his journal:

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

A few weeks later, Wesley preached a sermon on the doctrine of personal salvation by faith, which was followed by another, on God's **grace** "free in all, and free for all." Considered a pivotal moment, Daniel L. Burnett writes: "The significance of Wesley's Aldersgate Experience is monumental ... Without it the names of Wesley and Methodism would likely be nothing more than obscure footnotes in the pages of church history."

Wesley went on to preach outdoors to many thousands of people, travelling around 5,000 miles a year on horseback, sometimes delivering up to five sermons a day. He believed it was possible to attain perfection in this life, through the exercise of strict discipline, and he also laid great stress on the doctrine of assurance. "Every man can be saved, and every man can know that he is saved." John Wesley died on 2nd March 1791 and was buried at City Road Chapel, London. He never intended to found a new denomination, seeing Methodism, as it quickly came to be known, as an addition to Anglican practice. However, he felt forced to ordain his own ministers for ministry in America, which meant a split was inevitable. However, John Wesley remained an Anglican to the end of his life, and a hero of the faith to many.

*Sources: Wikipedia and Saints on Earth by John H Darch and Stuart K Burns.*

### **Verses for this week:**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

*Ephesians 2.8-9*

### **Something to raise a smile:**

A gentle Quaker, hearing a strange noise in his house one night, got up and discovered a burglar busily at work. He went and got his gun, came back and stood quietly in the doorway. "Friend," he said, "I would do thee no harm for the world, but thou standest where I am about to shoot."

*James Hines*

May the Lord bless you and give you the assurance that your sins are forgiven, so may your heart be strangely warmed.

With love and prayers

Simon