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Press Release

Luther and the Princes

Ground breaking exhibition of Martin Luther and his political allies – their power and collections.

Luther and the Princes is the first of four national special exhibitions that mark the 500th Anniversary of Luther and The Reformation. This groundbreaking exhibition takes place until October 31 this year in Hartenfels Castle in Torgau – Germany's largest preserved Renaissance castle located majestically above the shoreline of the Elbe River.

Nearly 500 years ago, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg. His actions began a movement that has shaped the world we know today and created the Protestant Church. Luther rejected several of the Catholic Church's teachings and opened the door for a religion that was accessible to the common people by translating the Bible into German from Latin and standing against the sale of indulgences – a practice of ensuring one salvation through extra donations to the Church.

No matter how compelling Luther's arguments had been, one man could not have stood up to the political powerhouse of the Catholic Church and lived to tell the tale without impressive supporters. The exhibition *Luther and the Princes* focuses not only on the religious aspects of the Reformation but also on Luther's formidable political allies, namely the Electors of Saxony: Frederick the Wise and later John the Constant. The Electors of Saxony were powerful, wealthy and intelligent leaders who changed history by standing up to the Church. The exhibit illustrates the overwhelming impact the Reformation had on politics, art, history, and even modern language. Paintings, treasury objects and ornate suits of armor along with numerous historical exhibits, provide a vivid impression of the interplay between politics and the Reformation and help bring the age of the Reformation back to life by illustrating the political atmosphere between the Electors of Saxony, the Holy Roman Emperor and the Church.

The art in the exhibition exemplifies the Electors of Saxony and their history. Although Frederick III was crucial to the success of the Reformation, he was actually a supporter of the Catholic Church. He did not oppose Luther's teachings and protected him for political reasons; his aim was to undermine the Holy Roman Emperor's growing power. However, his brother, John later dubbed John the Constant fought passionately for the Protestant idea. He co-ruled with Frederick until his death and afterwards made Torgau the chief residence of the Saxon electors. Martin Luther spent a great deal of time with John during those years discussing ideas and politics.

Luther and the Princes is located in Torgau's Hartenfels Castle in Saxony. Torgau is one of Germany's most beautiful Renaissance towns, surrounded by Wittenberg, Leipzig, and Dresden. It was the political center of the Reformation and a key city for Martin Luther, who visited the city over 40 times. He preached in Torgau for the first time in 1521. The

Chapel in Hartenfels Castle is the world's first Protestant Church inaugurated by Luther himself on October 5th, 1544. The palace chapel is still preserved to this day and is open for visitors. The exhibit takes place at Hartenfels Castle, the Electoral Chancellery and the Superintendent Building. Torgau is filled with architectural gems, with more than 500 listed buildings from the late Gothic and Renaissance periods that can be seen on a stroll through the narrow streets. The town offers an authentic backdrop to the *Luther and the Princes* exhibition.

Torgau is also the famous meeting point of Soviet and US Troops during World War II. On April 25, 1945, Soviet and US forces met on the bridge over the Elbe to shake hands, the Soviets coming from the East and the Americans from the West. The resulting photographs commemorate the end of the war and is an official holiday in Germany called, "Elbe Day."

Torgau is easily accessible by train from Leipzig. *Luther and the Princes* is open from 10am-6pm, closed on Mondays until October 31st.

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