

APRIL 4

Friends,

The fourth day of the fourth month of our calendar year has a rich historical record. Here are some of the things that have happened in our lifetimes:

1949—NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Alliance)

1958—the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament displays the famous “peace symbol” for first time ☸

1968—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated

1969—Dr. Denton Cooley installed the first human artificial heart to have some success (patient Haskell Karp lived for 65 hours waiting for a human heart for transplant)

1975—Bill Gates and Paul Allen establish Microsoft

1983—first space shuttle flight, maiden voyage of Challenger

Going back farther in time shows us more remarkable events. Just mention a few in passing...

397—death of St. Ambrose of Milan (every time we do antiphonal chant in worship, thank God for him); one of the four great “Doctors of the early Church”

1147—City of Moscow is mentioned for the first time in the historical record

1581—Francis Drake is knighted for first known circumnavigation of the world

1818—US Congress adopts the design of the American flag: 13 stripes for original colonies and a star for every state (20 by then)

1841—Wm Henry Harrison is first president to die in office (pneumonia)—only one so far to die in office of natural causes

1859—“Dixie” performed for the first time at Mechanics Hall in NYC by the “Christie’s Minstrels”***

1873—Kennel Club founded; first pureblood dog registry

1887—Argonia, Kansas elects Suzanna M. Salter first woman mayor in USA

***I've asterisked the item about the tune "Dixie" because the story of that tune and its subsequent associations is fascinating. 1850's musical theatre—minstrel shows—were a huge cultural reality, being shaped by contemporary life and also influencing it in return. "Dixie" was composed for the "Christy's Minstrels" blackface performances, which offered a comic exaggeration of "darkies on the plantation". The irony of a tune which was originally a blackface mockery/imitation of white plantation owner "elegant behavior" (the minstrel show "cakewalk") being adopted as an unofficial anthem of the Confederacy is a mystery of history. Minstrel shows continued after the Civil War, including more and more stylized cakewalk sequences—sometimes done in drag (move over, RuPaul).

If you're interested, google Minstrel shows or Dixie for more about this.

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Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall in to sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen