



## **JOHN NEWTON 1642-1727**

How can a sailor known as "The Great Blasphemer" be memorialized for the declarations in the hymn, "Amazing Grace" by the end of his life? John Newton journeyed as a sailor between Africa and slave markets from age eleven, through the first half of his life. His reputation for profanity, coarseness, and debauchery, that even shocked other sailors, was a far cry from the training in the Scriptures his mother had given him. On board a ship that had been threshing around in an Atlantic storm for over a week, and knowing the sailors had little hope of survival since the ship seemed to be ripping apart, those Scriptures came to mind, and began to turn his mind to Christ. Surviving this terrible storm, Newton found a New Testament and began to read. Luke 11:13 seemed to assure him that God might still hear him: "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." He accredited that day at the helm, March 21, 1748, as the "day the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep waters."

His profession as a slave trader continued for a time. But through a newly established discipline of Bible study, prayer and reading Christian articles, his life changed. Instead of defaming Christ to fellow sailors, he now strove to be a Christian example to them. Finally John Newton left slave-trading and, at the age of thirty nine, in 1764, his mother's prayers were answered and he began a forty-three year career of preaching the Gospel of Christ. He and his wife Mary moved to the market town of Olney.

Newton often composed a hymn for Sunday evening services, which would develop the lessons and Scripture for the evening. In 1779, 280 of these hymns were published as the Olney Hymns. One of the most famous, "Faith's Review and Expectation," grew out of the study of David. We know it today as the hymn "Amazing Grace." When John Newton moved to become the rector of St. Mary Woolnoth in London, he ministered to poor and wealthy alike. Newton's life and writings about the slave trade encouraged William Wilberforce in his fight to abolish slavery. Missionaries William Carey and Henry Martyn also gained strength from Newton's counsel.

At the end of his life, he lived to be eighty-two years old, John Newton never ceased to be amazed by God's grace. He told his friends, "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that God is a great Savior."