

# Charlemagne: Conqueror and Christian

## Erin Kortering

Charlemagne, meaning Charles the Great, was born to Pepin the Short in 742. His grandfather and father conquered much of modern day France and Germany and like his ancestors, Charlemagne was a great warrior. To his inherited domain of France and Germany, Charlemagne added Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands, along with parts of Austria and Spain. Due to his excellent organizational skills, where every aspect of the battle would be planned his large army moved over enormous expanses of land quickly and efficiently. For instance, Charlemagne and his officers carefully determined the amount of food supplies as well as the wagon in which the supplies were to be carried was carefully chosen. His goal in these campaigns was to Christianize the surrounding countries. For example, in a day when it was common for a conquering king to kill the rulers of the defeated land, Charlemagne often spared these men's lives.

In 768, Charlemagne inherited the crown of the Frankish Empire along with his brother Carlomen. Later, when his brother died in 771, he became the sole ruler. On Christmas Day of 800, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne the first Holy Roman Emperor, while Charlemagne knelt in prayer. Pope Leo III did this for the protection of both Rome and the himself from accusations of weakness and mediocrity. He deemed Charlemagne the best protector.

Poverty and oppression of the common folk by the nobles surrounded Charlemagne's rule. Charlemagne tried to change this by decreeing laws to protect the peasant and farmer. He appointed special men called *missi dominici* to ride about his realm inspecting the local governments, administering justice, if need be, and reawakening the locals to their moral and religious responsibilities. He tried to better the lives of his people by encouraging new methods of farming, by promoting commerce with other villages and provinces, and by establishing a money standard.

Charlemagne possessed a ready sense of humor, simple tastes, and a love for outdoor activities such as hunting and swimming. He was very much a family man. He enjoyed having his many children with him, and it was common to see he and his children riding about the countryside.

In a day when little education existed outside of the clergy, Charlemagne set up schools that could be attended by both peasants and nobles. He brought in scholars from England and Ireland to teach at these schools. His interest in an educational system may have stemmed from his own interest in knowledge. He hired a monk from England to be his own private tutor and he mastered both Latin and Greek, along with music and astronomy. At meals, learned books were read to him, instead of the court jester performing. His favorite book was Augustine's City of God.

Besides being a great warrior and a firm believer in education, Charlemagne devoted himself to God. He did much to expand the church by urging the clergy and nobles to reform. His devotion to the church motivated him throughout his entire life. ❖

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