

## LutherFacts #25

Upon returning to Wittenberg during early 1522, Martin Luther confronted an unfolding scene of social and political disorder. He quickly realized that a profound change on his part was necessary. Until then, he had been the lightning-rod calling for institutional change, the rebel monk who had challenged the Pope. He found that he had to now become a force for stability. To do this, however, it was necessary to oppose many of his followers. Influenced by leaders like Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Muntzer, they had turned to more radical measures. Throughout 1523-24, with powerful sermons and forceful writings, Luther took steps to oppose both men. He chastised Karlstadt for ordering the destruction of religious icons and relics, part of a larger iconoclastic movement that had swept across northern Europe. Luther called for moderation in reforming the existing churches. In the case of Muntzer, who had assumed leadership of an uprising of the German peasants against their rulers, Luther tried to intercede and urged economic reforms to meet peasant grievances. When that failed, and violence against their rulers continued, he attacked Muntzer and rejected the uprisings. By the end of 1525, with Luther's explicit backing, the peasant uprisings were brutally repressed. In the end, Karlstadt turned away from the Reformation and Muntzer was executed. In light of these tragic events and the threats they had posed, Luther came to believe more fervently than ever that orderly and peaceful change was essential for the Reformation to go forth.