

John Roberts, priest and missionary (1853 - 1949)

Observed February 25

John Roberts was born in Wales in the middle of the 19th century. After university he was ordained and sent to the Bahamas to minister. There he worked among the black population, particularly lepers. Because the population were all Christians, he found the work insufficiently challenging. So he went to New York in quest of an appointment to ministry among the American Indian nations, his lifelong dream. Bishop Spaulding accepted this dedicated young man and sent him off to Colorado where he worked among the miners until he was finally able to go to the Shoshone and Arapahoe. The two tribes spoke different language, had widely divergent cultures, and nurtured intense hostility toward one another. Roberts learned both languages and worked hard to help them maintain their cultures as they learned to live with one another and in a changing modern world. He established an educational system for both boys and girls, in which he worked tirelessly throughout his life. Despite his concerns about the very challenging living situation, his fiancé soon came to him from her wealthy home in the Bahamas. They worked side by side, soon joined by five children. He established numerous churches and ministered to poor and powerful alike among the two tribes. One notable experience was ministering to a very aged Sacajawea and presiding at her funeral. One of his daughters collected his journals, correspondence, and translations which were then published in the book *Walk Softly, This is God's Country: Sixty-six Years among the Shoshone and Arapahoe Indians, 1883-1949, Wind River Reservation; Letters and Journals of Reverend John Roberts.*

Like many of the best loved and most successful missionaries, he devoted much energy and attention to learning the whole culture of the people he was sent to: language, traditions, customs, practices, and beliefs. His language skills enabled him to participate in translate scripture texts so that the Arapaho and Shoshone could read and hear the Word of God in their own tongues. More information and pictures can be found in the writings of a Welsh tourist at http://www.dyserth.com/html/rev_john_roberts.html.

Lessons Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:4,6b-12a; Psalm 90:13-17; Acts 3:18-25; John 7:37-41a

Collect Creator God, we thank you for bringing your missionary John Roberts from his native land to live and teach your Gospel in a spirit of respect and amity among the Shoshone and Arapahoe peoples in their own language; and we pray that we also may share the Good News of your Christ with all we meet as friends brought together by your Holy Spirit; for you are one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, living and true, to the ages of ages. Amen.