

Suggested Readings: *Isaiah 52: 7 – 10; Psalm 90: 1, 2, 12 – 14; Mark 16: 15 – 20.*

Willibrord was born in Northumbria in AD 658. When he was still a child his father decided to become a hermit, so Willibrord was sent to be educated at the monastery in Ripon, of which Bishop Wilfrid (12th October) was abbot, and where he was professed as a monk when he was fifteen. Five years later, while Wilfrid was in exile, Willibrord travelled to Ireland, to join two other Saxons, Egbert and Wigbert. He spent twelve years in study in Ireland and was ordained priest. In 690 he returned to England with Egbert, who sent him, as one of a group of twelve, to preach the Gospel to Germanic peoples related to some of the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain.

They landed at the mouth of the Rhine and travelled into the realm of the Frankish ruler Pepin, who encouraged them to preach to the Frisians, in an area along the seacoast of what is now The Netherlands, which Pepin had taken from the pagan ruler Radbod.

After two years Willibrord went to Rome to obtain papal authority for the mission. He went there again in 695, and was consecrated to be archbishop of the Frisians, with his see in what is now Utrecht. He set about the establishment of churches and monasteries, including the great foundation at Echternach (now in Luxembourg).

When Duke Pepin died in 714 Radbod took back the Frisian lands, destroyed churches and killed many of the Christian missionaries. Willibrord and his companions retreated to the Frankish territory. Radbod was killed in 719, and, under the protection of Pepin's heir, Charles Martel, Willibrord was able to return to his work in Eastern Frisia. For about three years he was joined in his work by Boniface, another Anglo-Saxon missionary (*5th June*), who would later become archbishop to the German lands. During the next twenty-seven years Willibrord ordained priests and consecrated bishops to extend and continue his work. He was still living, *longing with all his heart for the prize of a heavenly reward* when Bede completed his *History* in AD 731.

In old age Willibrord retired to his monastery of Echternach, where at the age of eighty-one, he died on 7th November 739. He was at once recognized as a saint and was buried in the crypt of the abbey church. In 1031 a new church was built in his honour, and he is venerated there today as The Apostle to the Frisians.