

# John Witherspoon 1723-1794

*"Equipped the Revolutionary Generation"*



John Witherspoon College is proud to bear the name of the man President John Adams called “as high a Son of Liberty, as any Man in America.” This remarkable scholar-pastor-professor-college president-statesman-patriot played a major role in establishing America as a new “City on a Hill.” As president of the College of New Jersey, (today’s Princeton University), Witherspoon shaped the lives of myriad students, including 12 future members of the Continental Congress, 12 governors, 10 cabinet officers, 37 judges (three of whom served on the Supreme Court), 39 congressmen, 21 senators, a vice president, and the “Father of the Constitution,” President James Madison.

John Witherspoon was born in Scotland in 1723. He followed in his father’s footsteps and became a Presbyterian minister. He pastored two churches in Scotland over a 23-year period, married, and fathered 10 children, five of whom lived to adulthood. In 1768, the 45-year-old Witherspoon and his family made the perilous journey across the Atlantic Ocean to the American colonies where Witherspoon commenced his 26-year tenure as college president. Witherspoon inspired his students to grow in their Christian faith and to strive to become leaders in their professions and public life—goals JWC aspires to instill in its students today through Christ-Centered learning, living, and leading. Witherspoon modeled what he taught. In addition to teaching at the college and preaching throughout the colonies, Witherspoon served in the Second Continental Congress. He was the only active pastor and college president to sign the Declaration of Independence. The ensuing Revolutionary War cost him the life of his son, James, but Witherspoon continued to actively support the birth of the new nation. He helped draft the Articles of Confederation and later advocated for ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

JWC strives to mirror the courage, faith, and vision of John Witherspoon who reminded his fellow citizens on the eve of the Revolution: “If your cause is just, if your principles are pure, if your conduct is prudent you need not fear the multitude of opposing hosts. If your cause is just you may look with confidence to the Lord and entreat Him to plead it as your own.”