



THANKSGIVING IN AMERICA

Celebrating God's Goodness

Scripture encourages thanksgiving for the providential goodness of God:

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!... Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things...Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

Psalm 107:1, 8-9, 15 ESV

Among the first American settlers, the Pilgrims faithfully gave God thanks when they arrived in the New World on November 11, 1620. "Having undertaken for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith," according to the Mayflower Compact, Pilgrim leader William Bradford described their thankfulness upon disembarking their ship:

"Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth... What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace?"



Helped by a Native named Squanto, the Pilgrims enjoyed a bountiful harvest in the fall of 1621. Edward Winslow voiced their gratitude: "God be praised, we had a good increase of corn ... by the goodness of God, we are far from want." Winslow also records: "Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling (turkey hunting), so that we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors." The Pilgrims shared their feast.

The Pilgrim's practice of celebrating Thanksgiving took hold in New England, eventually spreading into neighboring colonies and becoming an annual tradition. During the War for Independence, the Continental Congress made eight Thanksgiving proclamations. President George Washington issued the first Thanksgiving proclamation under the U.S. Constitution on October 3, 1789, just days after the Bill of Rights was approved.



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Yet it was President Abraham Lincoln who established a national Thanksgiving Day holiday. On October 3, 1863, Lincoln made the following Thanksgiving proclamation:

“The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies... No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, Who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy...”

Thanksgiving Action Steps:

1. God providentially sent an English-speaking Native named Squanto to help the Pilgrims learn how to survive. **Thank God for his providence.**
2. The Pilgrims were filled with gratitude for their abundant harvest in 1621, inviting the Natives to a feast. **Thank God for opportunities to share with people.**
3. Later, a drought reportedly reduced the Pilgrims to a few kernels of corn per day, but God sent rain just in time to restore the withered crops, leading to a Thanksgiving feast in 1623. God provides. **Thank God for his provision.**
4. The Pilgrims practiced their faith freely in America, but today religious liberty is limited by courts and policies. While President Trump has pledged to take the IRS muzzle off ministers, Congress must act first. Call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Or visit FRC.org and click on Contact Officials. Request that they support the Free Speech Fairness Act (H.R. 781, S. 264). **Thank God for our First Freedom**—the freedom to believe and live according to those beliefs—and for his preserving presence in America.



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