

## **Remembering the First Thanksgiving**

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This is Thanksgiving week in the United States, so this will be a special GLC Series email. The celebration traces its history back to the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1621 – with Pilgrims and Indians. Here is a little background.

In 1620, the Pilgrims sacrificed greatly for the hope of creating a new civilization where they could worship God freely according to their beliefs and consciences, and build a free society with religious and civil liberty for everyone. They left their families and sold their property to take a 6-week voyage across the Atlantic Ocean and begin a new life. Because they landed at Cape Cod, far north of their planned destination (Virginia), they had to start a new settlement in the wilderness. Since it was November, winter was upon them and they scrambled to build shelters and unfinished homes. Food was scarce, and the cold severe. Half of them died that first winter, including 13 of 18 wives.

Earlier in 1620, an English-speaking Indian named Squanto had returned from England to that area and found his entire tribe wiped out by a plague. So he served as an aide and interpreter for the chief of another tribe, Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoags. In March 1621, they came to the Pilgrims and made the first peace treaty in New England, which lasted more than 50 years. By God's providence, Squanto stayed and taught the Pilgrims how to fish, catch eels, plant corn, pumpkins and other crops (as the Indians did successfully in the sandy soil), hunt beaver and sell the pelts, and do many other things that provided food, supplies, and commerce, helping them survive. By April 1621, Captain Jones of the Mayflower ship (on which the Pilgrims arrived) determined it was safe to return to England, and pleaded with them to return with him. But every one of the surviving Pilgrims stayed.

Now I'll share the historical account of the First Thanksgiving, as researched and documented by Peter Marshall and David Manuel in, "The Light and the Glory: Did God have a plan for America?" (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Fleming H. Revell, 1977, pp. 125-136).

"That summer of 1621 was beautiful. Much work went into the building of new buildings, and ten men were sent north up the coast in the sailing shallop to conduct trade with the Indians. Squanto once again acted as their guide and interpreter. It was a successful trip, and that fall's harvest provided more than enough corn to see them through their second winter.

"The Pilgrims were brimming over with gratitude—not only to Squanto and the Wampanoags who had been so friendly, but to their God. In Him they had trusted, and He had honored their obedience beyond their dreams. So, Governor [William] Bradford

declared a day of public Thanksgiving, to be held in October. Massasoit was invited, and unexpectedly arrived a day early—with *ninety* Indians! Counting their numbers, the Pilgrims had to pray hard to keep from giving in to despair. To feed such a crowd would cut deeply into the food supply that was supposed to get them through the winter.

“But if they had learned one thing through their travails, it was to trust God *implicitly*. As it turned out, the Indians were not arriving empty-handed. Massasoit had commanded his braves to hunt for the occasion, and they arrived with no less than five dressed deer, and more than a dozen fat wild turkeys! They helped with the preparations, teaching the Pilgrim women how to make hoecakes and a tasty pudding out of cornmeal and maple syrup. Finally, they showed an Indian delicacy: how to roast corn kernels in an earthen pot until they popped, fluffy and white—*popcorn*!

“The Pilgrims in turn provided many vegetables from their household gardens: carrots, onions, turnips, parsnips, cucumbers, radishes, beets, and cabbages. Also, using some of their precious flour, they took summer fruits which the Indians had dried and introduced them to the likes of blueberry, apple, and cherry pie. It was all washed down with sweet wine made from the wild grapes. A joyous occasion for all!

“Between meals, the Pilgrims and Indians happily competed in shooting contests with gun and bow. The Indians were especially delighted that John Alden and some of the younger men of the plantation were eager to join them in foot races and wrestling. There were even military drills staged by Captain Standish. Things went so well (and Massasoit showed no inclination to leave) that Thanksgiving Day was extended for three days.

“Surely, one moment stood out in the Pilgrims’ memory—William Brewster’s prayer, as they began the festival. They had so much for which to thank God: for providing all their needs, even when their faith had not been up to believing that He would do so; for the lives of the departed and for taking them home to be with Him; for their friendship with the Indians—so extraordinary when settlers to the south of them had experienced the opposite; for all His remarkable providences in bringing them to this place and sustaining them” (pp. 135-136).

Additional source: George Bancroft, “History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent” (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1846), Volume I, pp. 306-317.

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*“But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all” (Philippians 2:17).*

*“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving . . . He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:14, 23).*

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).*