



Thanksgiving



I. Why the Pilgrims Came

In England, there was one dominant church... the Church of England (Anglican Church). Being influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, it practiced and believed things contrary to the **Bible** and persecuted those who didn't agree. There was a group of Christians who wanted to worship and live by the Bible alone. They separated themselves from the state church and got the name, "**Separatists.**" The Separatists believed that churches should be independent and self-governing. They believed the Bible should be the authority without any human inventions added to its teachings. Pastor **John Robinson** was pastor of a group of Separatists in Scrooby England in 1606. Because of persecution, they fled to a Dutch city in Holland. They grew to about 1000 people. The living conditions were hard, and they felt as though God was calling them in a new direction. They had a desire to take the gospel to the new world and trust God by faith. On Sep.6, 1620, the "**Pilgrims**" set sail from Plymouth, England on the Mayflower to settle in Virginia. There were about one hundred people on the ship as it sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. Thirty five of them were Separatists. The others were seeking better economic opportunities and freedom. After sixty six days, they reached shore! They discovered that the "wind" had blown them off course about one hundred miles north of Virginia. As they prayed, it was agreed that perhaps God was the one responsible for blowing them off course. On Dec.21, 1620, they decided to settle at "New" **Plymouth.**

II. The Hardships

This was a whole new way of life. It was windy, freezing, and they were running out of food. Every month, there was a handful that died. At one point, there were only about five men that had enough strength to bury the dead. A total of half had died and things were looking grim. They had run into some Indians and were very afraid. It was their fear that the Indians would kill them and take everything they had. Because the Indians were spying on them, they buried the dead at night, so it didn't look like they were dying off and getting weak.

III. A Big Surprise

It was on a Friday in the middle of March that they had a big surprise. They saw an Indian walking into the middle of their village. The Pilgrims were too startled to speak. "Welcome!" he suddenly boomed in a deep voice. The Pilgrims realized this Indian was there to make peace, so they brought him food and drink. They were amazed that he could speak English. His name was **Samoset**. He was chief of the Algonquin Tribe, which was some distance away. Samoset loved to travel and had learned English from various Englishmen, who had sailed around the area. He was at that time passing through the area. He told them that the area they had settled on was the home of the **Patuxet** Indians. This tribe was a large hostile tribe who had murdered every white man who landed on their shores. Four years prior to the Pilgrims arrival, a mysterious plague had broken out, killing every man, woman, and child. The surrounding Indian tribes believed some kind of supernatural spirit had done this, and they wouldn't dare step onto it. The cleared land they were on belonged to no one. The closest tribe was the **Wampanoags** some fifty miles away. This was the tribe that Samoset was visiting. Samoset stayed the night with the Pilgrims and then departed back to the Wampanoags. One week later, Samoset returned with another Indian. This Indian's name was **Squanto.**

IV. Squanto's History

Fifteen years before the Pilgrims arrived, Squanto and four others were taken captive by an English explorer named George Weymouth. These Indians were taken to England and were taught English. They wanted the Indians to inform them about the land and the other Indians around the territory. Squanto was in England for nine years. He was then brought back to his people in 1614 by Captain **John Smith.** He was again taken captive by another ship and ended up in Spain. Eventually, he made his way back to his people a second time, but found nothing but bones. This greatly saddened Squanto as he lost his desire and purpose to live. He then joined himself with the Wampanoags. This was six months before the Pilgrims arrived. God had a prepared place and a prepared person to help the Pilgrims.

V. Squanto's New Family

When Samoset brought Squanto to his old village, he saw a new purpose to live. Squanto had lost his tribe, but there was a new people living in their place. He decided to stay with this new people and help them. He knew that if he didn't, they too would die. Squanto brought all of the Wampanoags to meet the Pilgrims. The chief's name was **Massasoit**. They made a treaty to live at peace. This lasted for forty years! Squanto taught them how to live off the land. He taught them how to catch eels, plant corn, catch fish, stalk deer, plant pumpkins, refine maple syrup, gather herbs, pick berries, utilize beaver skins, and how to trade with other Indians. Things were looking up for the Pilgrims. The plenteous supply of food would now get them through the winter.

VI. Thanksgiving

The Pilgrims were thankful for Squanto and the friendship of the Wampanoag tribe. God had been good to them. In order to acknowledge their thankfulness to God, Governor **William Bradford** declared shortly after a day of public Thanksgiving to be held in October...

"Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as he has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience. Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty-three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings."

William Bradford Ye Governor of Ye Colony

Massasoit was invited and unexpectedly arrived a day early... with ninety Indians! This threw the Pilgrims into a panic. How would they feed them all? This would cut into their food supply for the winter. They began to pray and realized that God has and will provide. The Indians brought food too! They brought five deer and twelve fat turkeys. They taught the women how to make sweet deserts out of cornmeal and maple syrup. They also showed them how to make popcorn. The Pilgrims provided vegetables out of their gardens, carrots, onions, turnips, cucumbers, radishes, beets, and cabbages. They took the dried fruits that the Indians gave them and made pies. The opening prayer was a highlight. **William Brewster** thanked God for Squanto and the friendship of the Indians. He thanked God for all his care and provision. Other settlers in the South were not doing so well. It was obvious that God was blessing them in a special way. Between meals, they happily competed in shooting contests with guns and bow. They had running races and wrestling matches. They were having such a good time that Chief Massasoit didn't want to leave! This first Thanksgiving was extended for three days!

VII. Give Thanks!

- A. (1Thess.5:18) "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."
- B. What are some things you can give God thanks for?
- C. What are some Thanksgiving traditions you have?
- D. What is your favorite thing to eat on Thanksgiving?