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"Measured by the standards of men of their time, [the Pilgrims] were the humble of the earth. Measured by later accomplishments, they were the mighty. In appearance weak and persecuted they came -- rejected, despised -- an insignificant band; in reality strong and independent, a mighty host of whom the world was not worthy, destined to free mankind." - Calvin Coolidge

Cold and sick, fighting snow and sleet, a motley band of English men and women struggled through their first winter in the New World. Fewer than 50 of the 110 pilgrims and crew that had stepped off the Mayflower survived until spring. On their own, the Pilgrims would have likely all perished their first year on the coast of New England.

God had better plans for them.

In March of 1621, a loincloth-covered native stepped out of the woods and said, "Welcome" in clear English. Samoset, the chief of the Algonquins, had learned English from the fishing ships that occasionally put into the coast of Maine. A few days later he returned to the little Pilgrim village with another English speaking native named Tisquantum (aka "Squanto").

When the Pilgrims arrived in late 1620, they settled on cleared land that belonged to nobody. Squanto's entire tribe had been wiped out while he was in England after having been taken as a slave in 1605. After returning to his native homeland with Captain John Smith in 1614, Squanto was again kidnapped and taken to Spain, where he was bought by local friars and introduced to Christianity. When he returned home, he found his tribe gone and the land that had belonged to them shunned by other tribes. He wandered until he found the Wampanoags who lived about 50 miles to the southwest.

And so, Squanto proved to be a literal God-send for the Pilgrims. He stayed with them and taught them how to stalk deer and catch eels and plant corn the Indian way. He showed them how to refine maple syrup and to discern which wild plants were edible and which were poisonous. He introduced them to trapping beavers, the pelts of which were in high demand in Europe. Without his help, few of the Pilgrims would have survived.

By the autumn of 1621, the Pilgrims were well-prepared for the coming winter and extremely grateful to God, to the Wampanoags, and to Squanto. Governor Bradford declared a day of public thanksgiving to be held in October. They invited Massasoit, the Wapanoags' chief, to a feast to celebrate their bounty. The Wapanoags taught the Pilgrims the art of making popcorn and the Pilgrims introduced the Indians to fruit pies.

The Pilgrims had additional days of thanksgiving for God's provision during the next years of difficulty and hunger, but we remember these days of feasting and games and competitions in our Thanksgiving celebrations. God had shown He cared for this little band of persecuted Englishmen in search of religious and civil freedom.

There have been several days of thanksgiving since the time of the Pilgrims.

1777: Samuel Adams made a thanksgiving day proclamation that was adopted by all 13 states:

"It is therefore recommended... to set apart Thursday the eighteenth day of December next, for solemn Thanksgiving and praise, that with one heart and one voice the good people may express the grateful feelings of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor..."

October, 1789: President George Washington proclaimed Thursday the Twenty-sixth day of November to be a day of national thanksgiving to Almighty God.

October, 1863: President Abraham Lincoln announced that the last Thursday of November would be dedicated "as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

Finally, an act of Congress in 1941 dedicated the fourth Thursday of November for the purpose of thanking our Creator.

Even as our forefathers acknowledged the provision and goodness of God, let us also make this national holiday a very special time to thank Him for our own provision - our families, our sustenance and, above all, our redemption in His Son!

Related Links:

- [The First Thanksgiving - Koinonia House](#)
- [The Pilgrims and America's First Thanksgiving - Holidays on the Net](#)
- [Biography of Tisquantum - "Squanto" - Mayflower History](#)