

[www.preparetheway.us](http://www.preparetheway.us)  
[stephen@preparetheway.us](mailto:stephen@preparetheway.us)  
(541) 325-2639



## PREPARE THE WAY

*The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.*

LUKE 3:5

### Thanksgiving Day: A Uniquely American Tradition

“Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, And for His wonderful works to the children of men! For He satisfies the longing soul, And fills the hungry soul with goodness.” – Psalm 107:8-9

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” – 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

“Praise the LORD! Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? Who can declare all His praise?” – Psalm 106:1-2

Some of the first Thanksgivings to God in North America:

1541 at Palo Duro Canyon, Texas with Coronado and 1,500 of his men exploring north from Mexico City.  
1564, near Jacksonville, Florida, French Huguenot colonists solemn assembly of praise and thanksgiving to God.

1610, after a particularly harsh winter where the Jamestown colony was nearly wiped out due to famine, an English supply ship arrived and they held a thanksgiving prayer service to commemorate.

However, it is from the Pilgrims 3-day feast in December of 1621 that we commemorate our current Thanksgiving holiday. After leaving Plymouth, England on September 6, 1620 they landed at Plymouth Rock on December 11, and immediately had a prayer service consecrating their endeavors to God. However, they were met with a harsh winter that they were unprepared for.

Robert W. Weir, Oil on canvas, 12' x 18',  
Commissioned 1837; placed 1844, Rotunda of  
the U.S. Capitol

Protestant pilgrims are shown on the deck of the ship *Speedwell* before their departure for the New World from Delft Haven, Holland, on July 22, 1620. William Brewster, holding the Bible, and pastor John Robinson lead Governor Carver, William Bradford, Miles Standish, and their families in prayer. The prominence of women and children suggests the importance of the family in the community. At the left side of the painting is a rainbow, which symbolizes hope and divine protection.



102 pilgrims landed at Plymouth in December of 1620. Less than six months later only 55 were still alive. After losing nearly half of the colonists that winter, they continued to fervently pray for God's hand to be upon their venture. With the help of the local Wampanoag Indians the following year they were able to plant and reap a bountiful crop, which led to the renowned thanksgiving feast.

“Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest... and has made the forests to abound with game... 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... and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.”

– William Bradford, Governor Pilgrim Colony

The first national day of Thanksgiving and prayer was requested by the Legislature in 1789. President Washington then started a rich history by designating the first national day of Thanksgiving and prayer with this proclamation, “Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor. . . . Now, therefore, I do appoint Thursday, the 26th day of November 1789 . . . that we may all unite to render unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection.”

Even though there still was not a federally recognized national day of Thanksgiving to God, the States regularly called on their citizens to praise and give thanks to God.

For example, Thomas Jefferson as Governor of Virginia declared, “[I] appoint . . . a day of public Thanksgiving to Almighty God. . . to [ask] Him that He would . . . pour out His Holy Spirit on all ministers of the Gospel; that He would . . . spread the light of Christian knowledge through the remotest corners of the earth; . . . and that He would establish these United States upon the basis of religion and virtue.” (Governor Thomas Jefferson, 1779)

As Governor of Massachusetts, John Hancock proclaimed: “I . . . appoint . . . a day of public thanksgiving and praise . . . to render to God the tribute of praise for His unmerited goodness towards us . . . [by giving to] us . . . the Holy Scriptures which are able to enlighten and make us wise to eternal salvation. And [to] present our supplications...that He would forgive our manifold sins and . . . cause the benign religion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to be known, understood, and practiced among all the inhabitants of the earth.” (Governor John Hancock, 1790)

Sarah Josepha Hale, started to petition numerous presidents for over 21 years to have a formally recognized national Thanksgiving holiday and in 1852 she wrote:

“The American people have two peculiar festivals, each connected with their history and therefore of great importance in giving power and distinctness to their nationality. The Fourth of July Is the exponent of independence and civil freedom. Thanksgiving Day is the national pledge of Christian faith in God, acknowledging Him as the dispenser of blessings. These two festivals should be joyfully and universally observed throughout our whole country, and thus incorporated in our habits of thought as inseparable from American life.”

President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 set the last Thursday in November as the official national Thanksgiving holiday saying,

Lincoln said: “We are prone to forget the Source from which [the blessings of fruitful years and healthful skies] come... 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... I do, therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States... to observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father. Who dwelleth in the heavens.”

“I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.” Psalm 69:30

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Phil. 4:6