



Finding the Truth

About Thanksgiving

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Thanksgiving is more than just a time to gather with family to enjoy a good meal. It is a religious holiday that calls Americans to reflect upon their life, examine their ways, and give thanks for their blessings. History records a many lessons that can be learned from Thanksgiving.

In 1621 a group of religious Puritans left England to seek a land that would allow them religious freedom. Persecution pushed them to make a “pilgrimage” to America. It is from this journey that they became known as the “pilgrims.”

These Christians Puritans were conservative Bible believers who kept much of the Law of Moses. They were similar to the “Quakers” in that they promoted separation from pagan influences that still remain in Protestant Christianity. The Puritan’s desire was to achieve and preserve simplicity or 'purity' of faith that they felt had been lost amid Christianity. They came to America in order to continue the reformation away from Catholicism and the Church of England. The Pilgrims very likely kept a kosher diet and celebrated the feast days of Leviticus 23 like Passover or Sukkot. “The pilgrims based their customs on the Bible,” says Gloria Kaufer Greene, a food and holiday expert. “They knew that Sukkot was an autumn harvest festival, and there is evidence that they fashioned the first Thanksgiving after the Jewish custom of celebrating the success of the year’s crops.”

When the Pilgrims settled in America they were greeted by the Wampanoag Indians. History records about 90 Indians and 50 Puritans shared a meal of thanksgiving together sometime between September 21 and November 9. Based on the numbers, it was probably the Indians who brought most of the food. And let us not be mistaken, it was the Pilgrims who were the visitors and not the hosts to this meal.

For that first and historic Thanksgiving there was no football and there was most likely no turkey. The only written eye witness account of the first meal was by colonist Edward Winslow to his friend in England. In this letter he states that they ate “wild fowl and venison.” He doesn’t specify if there was deep fried turkey or not.

Corn might have been a plenty but the cornucopia was surely missing. The Puritans would have never allowed this now popular centerpiece. The cornucopia, which dates back to the 5th century BCE, is a pagan symbol of Greek mythology and fertility. Its origin and meaning is directly opposed to the personal holiness kept by the Puritan Pilgrims.

When they first gathered, the Pilgrims' Thanksgiving was not a scheduled event. It became an American ritual 200 years later. President George Washington declared November 26, 1789 a day of thanksgiving and prayer in honor of the establishment of the new government. Washington wanted this holiday to be renewed yearly but faced harsh criticism from Thomas Jefferson, who stated the government had no authority to observe a religious holiday. It was in the midst of the civil war that President Abraham Lincoln declared the final Thursday in November as a national day of gratitude. Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln all agreed that Thanksgiving is a spiritual holiday for worship and appreciation.

This year, millions will bow to their television and pay homage to sports. Most will gorge with the gods of appetite and gluttony. Some will recognize the spiritual significance of this day, reflect upon their blessings and give thanks. May we all desire to be like the Pilgrims and return to a purity of faith that has been lost over the years.