

Freedom's Feast **THANKSGIVING**

resources to get the most out of your **THANKSGIVING** celebration.

This ceremony option was created by [Christopher B. Nelson](#), President Emeritus of St. John's College in Annapolis, MD. Dr. Nelson designed it by selecting a number of the sidebar commentaries and primary texts from the original 2001 "We the People Give Thanks" booklet and assembling them into a ceremony ideal for non-family Thanksgiving gatherings. We are grateful to him for his creativity and his willingness to share this version with others. Chris and his family host a diverse gathering from the St. John's community in their home every year at Thanksgiving.



A Ceremony for Non-Family Gatherings

Leader Welcome to our Thanksgiving dinner. Most of us gathered here do not have other family members in the room, though we are all thinking of them and of other Thanksgiving celebrations we have shared with them in the past.

While Thanksgiving is usually celebrated with family, it is, above all other days in the year, one which Americans share with their friends and neighbors, with those whose families are too many miles away, with those from other countries who do not have this particular holiday in their tradition, and with those who have not otherwise the means to provide a bountiful meal for themselves. It is a time when we give thanks for the blessings we have: our family, our friends, our good fortune, and our nation.

Today, after a year of worldwide tumult, it seems appropriate to reflect a bit on the story of this nation, how we became "*We the People*," and why we might be grateful for being citizens of this country.

Leader Consider what we celebrate about this country as we read from The Declaration of Independence:

Reader WHEN in the Course of human Events, it becomes necessary for one People to dissolve the Political Bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent Respect to the opinions of Mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the Separation.

ALL We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness- That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.

How did the Thanksgiving tradition begin?

The Pilgrims, known in England as Separatists, were jailed, fined, and ostracized for rejecting the doctrines of the Church of England. They fled England in 1608 and established a church community in Leyden, Holland. When they decided to come to America, the London Company of Virginia sponsored their passage in exchange for labor and produce from the New World. In 1620 they set sail for Virginia with 42 men and women from the Leyden congregation and 60 passengers recruited by the London Company, including approximately 30 children. While harbored outside Cape Cod, the Pilgrims adopted the Mayflower Compact.

Of the 102 voyagers, only 55 survived the first winter. The rest died of exposure, scurvy, and dysentery. The few who were well enough risked their own health to tend to the sick. Perhaps they all would have died by the next winter had it not been for the help of the local Native Americans, specially English-speaking Squanto, the sole survivor of the Pawtuxet tribe in Plymouth.

The following fall the Pilgrims gathered their abundant harvest. It was during this time that they celebrated, for three days, their first Thanksgiving feast, joined by 90 of their Native American Friends.

Reader It is the Right of the People . . . to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

Reader We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the Rectitude of our Intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be, Free And Independent States . . .

Reader . . . and that as FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which INDEPENDENT STATES may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

ALL We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

-PREAMBLE TO THE CONSTITUTION

Reader Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

EMMA LAZARUS "The New Colossus"
(as it appears on a pedestal at the base of the Statue of Liberty)

Reader Proclaim freedom throughout the land and to all the inhabitants thereof.

LEVITICUS 24:10
Inscription on the Liberty Bell

When was it first proclaimed a national feast day?

Both houses of Congress have . . . requested me "to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by favoring them with an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness . . ."

PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON
October 3, 1789
Thanksgiving Proclamation, Establishes first national Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving Becomes a National Holiday, October 3, 1863.

Sara Josepha Hale, a prominent writer and women's magazine editor, led a 40-year national campaign to make Thanksgiving an annual national holiday. She even promoted the traditional meal that we still eat today. During the Civil War, she sensed real urgency in the matter, and wrote in an 1859 editorial that a national Thanksgiving holiday could give rise to "a renewed pledge of love and loyalty to the Constitution of the United States . . ."

Shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving. (Congress later changed it to the fourth Thursday to extend the Christmas shopping season.)

Lincoln hoped that Americans of both North and South would use the occasion to "heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and Union." Lincoln, like Hale, envisioned Thanksgiving Day as a time for all Americans to renew our pledge to the Constitution and rediscover our common purpose.

Reader We take the star from Heaven,
Red from our mother country,
Separating it by white stripes,
Thus showing that we have
Separated from her, and the
White stripes shall go down to
Posterity representing liberty.

PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON, FIRST U.S. PRESIDENT (1732-1799)

On the American Flag

Reader It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON, FOUNDING FATHER (1755-1804)

Federalist Paper No. 1

Reader Is it not the glory of the people of America, that whilst they have paid a decent regard to the opinions of former times and other nations, they have not suffered a blind veneration for antiquity, for custom, or for names, to overrule the suggestions of their own good sense, the knowledge of their own situation, and the lessons of their own experience? To this manly spirit, posterity will be indebted for the possession, and the world for the example of the numerous innovations displayed on the American theatre, in favor of private rights and public happiness.

PRESIDENT JAMES MADISON, FOURTH U.S. PRESIDENT (1781-1836)

Federalist Paper No. 14

Reader This government, the off-spring of our own choice uninfluenced and unawed . . . completely free in its principles . . . has a just claim to your confidence and your support. Respect for its authority, compliance with its Laws, acquiescence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true Liberty . . . the Constitution which at any time exists, 'till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole People, is sacredly obligatory upon all.

PRESIDENT GEORGE WASHINGTON, FIRST U.S. PRESIDENT (1732-1799)

Farewell Address

Reader "Four score and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN, SIXTEENTH U.S. PRESIDENT (1809-1865)

Gettysburg Address of 1863

Reader It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizen; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union . . . Men, their rights and nothing more, women, their rights and nothing less.

SUSAN B. ANTHONY, WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVIST (1820-1906)

Reader When an American says that he loves his country, he means not only that he loves the New England hills, the prairies glistening in the sun, the wide and rising plains, the great mountains, and the sea. He means that he loves an inner air, an inner light in which freedom lives and in which a man can draw the breath of self-respect.

ADLAI STEVENSON, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS (1900-1965)

Reader In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., CIVIL RIGHTS HERO (1929-1968)

Reader Freedom is an indivisible word. If we want to enjoy it, and fight for it, we must be prepared to extend it to everyone, whether they are rich or poor, whether they agree with us or not, no matter what their race or the color of their skin.

WENDELL WILKIE, REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE (1892-1944)

Reader And so my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.

**PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, THIRTY-FIFTH U.S. PRESIDENT (1917-1963)
1963 INAUGURAL ADDRESS**

Leader But this is not just a nation whose political institutions are vested in freedom. All of our institutions are grounded in it: our forms of education; our expressions of speech, thought, and religion; even our humor:

Reader The very aim and end of our institutions is just this: that we may think what we like and say what we think.

JUSTICE OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, U.S. SUPREME COURT (1841-1935)

Reader And I honor the man who is willing to sink
half his present repute for the freedom to think.
And, when he has thought, be his cause strong or weak,
will risk t'other half for the freedom to speak.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, POET (1819-1891)

Reader It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them.

MARK TWAIN, AUTHOR (1835-1910)

Reader We must dare to think "unthinkable" thoughts. We must learn to explore all the options and possibilities that confront us in a complex and rapidly changing world. We must learn to welcome and not to fear the

voices of dissent. We must dare to think about "unthinkable things" because when things become unthinkable, thinking stops and action becomes mindless.

JAMES WILLIAM FULBRIGHT, UNITED STATES SENATOR (1905-1995)

Reader Until legislators discover that the only way to make good citizens and subjects is to nourish them from infancy; and until parents shall be convinced that the worst of men are not the proper teachers to make the best, mankind cannot know to what degree of perfection society and government may be carried.

NOAH WEBSTER, AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER (1758-1843)

Reader Never let schooling get in the way of your education.

MARK TWAIN, AUTHOR (1835-1910)

Reader It is a land of practical wisdom too:

Reader From Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack:

Reader Eat to live, and not live to eat.

Reader Work as if you were to live a hundred years, pray as if you were to die tomorrow.

Reader Fish and visitors stink in 3 days.

Reader Hear no ill of a Friend, nor speak any of an Enemy.

Reader Little strokes fell great oaks.

Reader No pains, no gains.

Reader Beware Expenses; a small leak will sink a great ship.

Reader Teach your child to hold his tongue; he'll learn fast enough to speak.

Reader There will be sleeping enough in the grave

Reader Look before, or you'll find yourself behind.

Reader Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.

Reader Better slip with foot than tongue.

Reader Necessity never made a good bargain.

Reader Well done is better than well said.

Reader God helps them that help themselves.

Reader Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.

Reader Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.

MARK TWAIN, AUTHOR (1835-1910)

Leader It is a land with a big heart:

Reader When an American needs the assistance of his fellows, it is very rare for that to be refused, and I have often seen it given spontaneously and eagerly . . . When some unexpected disaster strikes a family, a thousand strangers willingly open their purses, and small but very numerous gifts relieve their distress.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, POLITICAL THEORIST (1805-1859)
Democracy in America

Leader It is a land that celebrates invention, ingenuity, artistry and generosity. It is a chorus of celebration of what free men and women do with their freedom:

Reader I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at
sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of
the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day--at night, the party of young fellows,
robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

WALT WHITMAN, POET (1819-1892)

Reader The American lives in a land of wonders: everything around him is in constant movement, and every movement seems an advance . . . nowhere does he see any limit placed by nature to human endeavor; in his eyes something which does not exist is just something that has not been tried yet.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, POLITICAL THEORIST (1805-1859)
Democracy in America

Reader If at first, an idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it.

ALBERT EINSTEIN, SCIENTIST (1879-1955)

Reader Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved

by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love.

REINHOLD NIEBUHR, AMERICAN THEOLOGIAN (1892-1971)

Reader I am an inventor. Faraday was a scientist. He didn't work for money . . . but I do. I measure everything I do by the size of a silver dollar. If it don't come up to that standard, then I know it's no good.

THOMAS EDISON, INVENTOR (1847-1931)

Reader One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

NEIL ARMSTRONG, ASTRONAUT (1930-2012)

Leader As we go to eat, let us remember our blessings and consider what we have to be grateful for. May we find the faith and the courage to face the challenges of the coming year – and may that year be one of peace, liberty and justice for all.

Let us join together and sing our praise:

America the Beautiful

O beautiful for spacious skies, For amber waves of grain, For purple mountain majesties

Above the fruited plain!

America! America!

God shed his grace on thee And crown thy good

With brotherhood

From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet

Whose stern, impassioned stress

A thoroughfare for freedom beat

Across the wilderness!

America! America!

God mend thine every flaw, Confirm thy soul

In self-control, Thy liberty in law!

O beautiful for heroes proved

In liberating strife.

Who more than self the country loved

And mercy more than life!

America! America!

May God thy gold refine

Till all success

Be nobleness And every gain divine!

O beautiful for patriot dream

That sees beyond the years

Thine alabaster cities gleam

Undimmed by human tears!

America! America! God shed his grace on thee

And crown thy good

With brotherhood

From sea to shining sea

Katharine Lee Bates (1859-1929)

Leader We cannot possibly have covered the particular things we each have to be thankful for. So, let us take just a moment to reflect silently on what just one of those things might be: What have you especially to be grateful for? And if there is ever a lull in the conversation at your dinner table, one question we might consider discussing is this: What does it mean to be truly grateful for something? Or grateful to someone? What is the proper condition of mind and heart for the expression of gratitude?

Bon Appetit!

Additional Songs

My Country, 'Tis of Thee

My country, 'tis of thee,
sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;
land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside let freedom ring.
My native country, thee,
land of the noble free, thy name I love;
I love thy rocks and rills, thy woods and templed hills;
my heart with rapture thrills like that above.
Let music swell the breeze, and ring from all the trees sweet freedom's song;
let mortal tongues awake, let all that breathe partake, let rocks their silence break, the sound prolong.
Our fathers' God, to thee, author of liberty, to thee we sing;
long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light; protect us by thy might, great God, our King.
Samuel Francis Smith, 1832

The National Anthem (please stand)

Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?
Francis Scott Key (1779 - 1843)

God Bless America (you may wish to stand.)

God Bless America, Land that I love
Stand beside her, and guide her Thru the night, with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies, To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America My home sweet home.
God Bless America,
Irving Berlin (1888-1989)

*The Nelson Household
St. John's College*