



## A TIME OF THANKSGIVING: THE JOURNEY OF THE PILGRIMS

NARRATOR 1  
NARRATOR 2  
NARRATOR 3  
NARRATOR 4  
BRADFORD  
SAMOSET

**NARRATOR 1:** On Thanksgiving there is no scene more familiar than a table filled with pilgrims and Native American Indians sharing a celebratory feast.

**NARRATOR 2:** But behind this simple scene there is a story to tell—a story that reminds us why faith and freedom are two of our nation’s greatest legacies.

**NARRATOR 3:** Our story begins in England—in the 1600’s—with a group of devout Christians called the Separatists.

**NARRATOR 4:** The Separatists were in a horrible state of spiritual desolation because the Church of England was the only means of worship available to them, and the church was political and corrupt.

**NARRATOR 1:** They were called Separatists because they wished to separate from the Church.

**NARRATOR 2:** It was dangerous business being a Separatist. Anyone who went against the Church of England had to face its fiercest defender—the king, James the First—and he had vowed to run all Separatists out of his country.

**NARRATOR 3:** Separatists were arrested, thrown into prison, and some were even executed.

**NARRATOR 4:** It would have been simple for these good people to continue about their daily business and not risk their lives for their faith, but they felt called to something more.

**NARRATOR 1:** Amid all this persecution, the Separatists made the monumental decision to become Pilgrims. A pilgrim is a term used to describe any person who goes on a long journey for a spiritual cause.

**NARRATOR 2:** And these pilgrims had their higher calling—to find a home where they would be free to worship God as they saw fit. So they planned to take their families and sneak out of England.

**NARRATOR 3:** Can you imagine leaving behind your home—your country—everything you ever knew—in order to find freedom of faith? This is what the pilgrims did.

**NARRATOR 4:** Holland was the only country in Europe that offered freedom of religion, so the Pilgrims made plans to secretly sail there under the cover of darkness.

**NARRATOR 1:** Escape from England was a monumental risk, but the Pilgrims undertook it all the same.

**NARRATOR 2:** Unfortunately, their first attempt ended in failure when an untrustworthy sea-captain betrayed them to the authorities. The Pilgrim men were thrown into prison.

**NARRATOR 3:** But when they were finally released, the pilgrims pooled their money and made a second attempt for Holland. This time they were successful.

**NARRATOR 4:** The shores of Holland with its majestic windmills turning in the breeze must have been quite a sight to the persecuted Pilgrims! Here at last they could be free!

**NARRATOR 1:** But life in Holland was not the solution to Pilgrim's problem. Just to survive, their men, women, and children had to labor from dawn until dusk.

**NARRATOR 2:** And while they had religious freedom, they found the morals of Holland to be lacking.

**NARRATOR 3:** They heard foul language in the streets and saw their children developing undesirable habits.

**NARRATOR 4:** Holland was not the holy home they had hoped for. But where else could they go?

**NARRATOR 1:** They prayed, and a seeming answer came. The countries of

Europe were founding new colonies in the vast wilderness of America.

**NARRATOR 2:** The Old World held no hope for the Pilgrims. Therefore, they must turn to the New World.

**NARRATOR 3:** Only there could the Pilgrims build a holy society—one where they would be free to worship God as they chose.

**NARRATOR 4:** The Pilgrims chartered a ship, the *Mayflower*, and began their voyage. 3,000 miles of the Atlantic Ocean lay between them and their destination—the Virginia colony.

**NARRATOR 1:** New challenges beset the Pilgrims. Because of their limited resources, they had been forced to share the *Mayflower* with settlers not of their own faith.

**NARRATOR 2:** These settlers despised and openly mocked them for their religious convictions.

**NARRATOR 3:** In addition, delays had caused the *Mayflower* to depart late in the year, and the waters were almost too rough to sail. All the passengers aboard were deathly sick.

**NARRATOR 4:** Instead of feeling pity, the ship's crew mocked the Pilgrims—predicting they would all soon be dead of sickness and their dead bodies thrown overboard. But the Pilgrims bore all this patiently.

**NARRATOR 1:** It's hard for us to imagine the conditions the Pilgrims endured aboard the *Mayflower*. 102 sickly men, women, and children were crammed into a space only 75 feet long and less than five feet high.

**NARRATOR 2:** The ship's deck above them leaked like sieve—and salt water sprayed down upon them between the planks.

**NARRATOR 3:** The rocking of the ship only grew worse as sea storms assailed the vessel. At one point the wind was tossing the ship so violently about that the captain was forced to lower the sails entirely.

**NARRATOR 4:** He threw up his hands and sadly declared that they were completely at the mercy of the storm.

**NARRATOR 1:** But the Pilgrims declared they were completely at the mercy of God, and it was to Him that they prayed.

**NARRATOR 2:** The ship survived the storm. But the rest of the voyage was a turbulent one. First, the structure of the ship became unstable. The constant sea-storms had battered it so badly that a main beam of the ship's hold had snapped like a chicken bone.

**NARRATOR 3:** The ship's captain said they must sail back to England before the beam broke completely. Thankfully, one of the pilgrims had brought along a large screw jack for constructing homes once they reached the New World.

**NARRATOR 4:** They used this to secure the beam back into place, and they were allowed to continue their voyage.

**NARRATOR 1:** A second catastrophe occurred. During yet another storm, a young pilgrim man fell overboard.

**NARRATOR 2:** Everyone thought he was lost, but as he flew into the ocean, the young man miraculously caught ahold of a sail rope, and although he was pulled down

ten feet beneath the churning waters, he held on long enough for the other men to hoist him back onto the ship.

**NARRATOR 3:** When the Pilgrims had set out, three women among them were pregnant, and one of these women gave birth while the *Mayflower* was in the midst of its voyage.

**NARRATOR 4:** She named her new son, Oceanus, after the rocking waves that accompanied his birth. A blessing of new life had come in the midst of the Pilgrim's dark voyage.

**NARRATOR 1:** The unfavorable conditions slowed the Pilgrims' progress, and as The *Mayflower's* journey dragged on, conditions aboard went from bad to worse.

**NARRATOR 2:** Food supplies ran low. The firewood was gone—and with it all warmth.

**NARRATOR 3:** The passengers had drunk their water barrels to the dregs. Soon there would be no fresh water.

**NARRATOR 4:** Those aboard began to show signs of malnutrition and scurvy—rancid breath, bleeding gums, and loosening teeth.

**NARRATOR 1:** Then the first one of the pilgrims died—a young boy who grew ill and never recovered. They all knew that they needed to reach the New World soon.

**NARRATOR 2:** Finally, after 66 grueling days at sea, over two months of sickness, the Pilgrims caught their first sight of land. Cape Cod appeared on the horizon.

**NARRATOR 3:** Seagulls wheeled in the sky over sandy cliffs that towered 100 feet into the air. It was America!

**NARRATOR 4:** America! It would be called sweet land of liberty for years to come. For those weary Pilgrims, it must have been a beautiful sight!

**NARRATOR 1:** But even more amazing was what it symbolized. Freedom—freedom to worship God as they wished.

**NARRATOR 2:** Yes, the Pilgrims had finally made it to the New World—but, unfortunately, their toughest trials were just beginning.

**NARRATOR 3:** They quickly realized that the storms had driven them far off course. They had missed the Virginia Colony completely. And also it was November. They had arrived far later in the year than originally planned. Winter was coming on. They were nearly out of food, and an unknown wilderness faced them—one filled with beasts and bloodthirsty savages.

**NARRATOR 4:** One of the pilgrims, a young man named William Bradford, would go on to be his people's greatest leader—but now, in the winter of 1611, he was just another man looking to survive.

**NARRATOR 1:** The pilgrims needed to build some shelter before winter arrived. Volunteering to help scout out a place for the passengers to go ashore, Bradford bid his wife Dorothy goodbye and departed from the *Mayflower*.

**NARRATOR 2:** When Bradford returned to the ship from his scouting expedition, heartbreaking news greeted him.

**NARRATOR 3:** Shortly, after his departure, Dorothy had slipped from the side of the moored ship and drowned in the bay.

**NARRATOR 4:** Some whispered that Dorothy had not slipped, but jumped willingly—frightened by the wild new world she saw before her.

**NARRATOR 1:** After surviving the perils of the sea, Bradford had lost the one closest to him. He penned these words in his journal...

**BRADFORD:** "Faint not, poor soul. In God still trust."

**NARRATOR 2:** At last the *Mayflower* harbored, and the passengers went ashore at a place now called Plymouth Rock. Once upon land, the Pilgrims fell upon their knees, for even though many of them were at the point of death, they had made it safely over the vast and furious ocean.

**NARRATOR 3:** There was little time for celebration though. A terrible truth quickly dawned upon them. They stood on the fringe of an unknown world—left to cope by themselves.

**NARRATOR 4:** Bradford later wrote about that feeling...

**BRADFORD:** There were no inns to welcome us. No friends to greet us. Before us lay a savage wilderness, filled with wild men and beasts. Behind us lay the width of the ocean. There was nothing—nothing—to sustain us—but the Spirit of God.

**NARRATOR 1:** The next three months spelled the darkest time of the pilgrim's journey. Harsh wintery conditions came on quickly.

**NARRATOR 2:** The *Mayflower*, still harbored in the bay, offered the only shelter for the women and children, while the men struggled to build homes upon the shore from timber and mud.

**NARRATOR 3:** Journeying back and forth though the frigid water, spelled the doom of many of the men.

**NARRATOR 4:** Pneumonia beset the pilgrims—along with malnutrition and the diseases they still suffered from the sea.

**NARRATOR 1:** At last all work ceased, and they huddled in the ship—pilgrims and settlers alike—fighting sickness and the cold conditions.

**NARRATOR 2:** Death began to take its toll.

**NARRATOR 3:** They were forced to lay many of their own—men, women, and children—in cold graves. Some days two or three died at a time.

**NARRATOR 4:** Their numbers began to dwindle.

**NARRATOR 1:** It looked like their journey would end in defeat.

**NARRATOR 2:** So many of the passengers became ill that there were only six left among them healthy enough to care for the others. Bradford later wrote about this in his memoirs.

**BRADFORD:** It was God who held these men up from sickness. These six bravely risked their own health to care for the others—wading ashore for firewood, changing the loathsome clothes of the sick, and tending to the needs of all the passengers, not just their fellow pilgrims.

**NARRATOR 3:** Some of the other settlers were driven to tears by the kindness of these pilgrims. They deeply regretted their earlier ridicule of them.

**NARRATOR 4:** The trials of that winter had accomplished one higher purpose though.

**NARRATOR 1:** The passengers of the *Mayflower* no longer saw themselves as divided into separate groups—religious refugees and secular settlers.

**NARRATOR 2:** They had melded into one.

**NARRATOR 3:** They had all become Pilgrims.

**NARRATOR 4:** The winter took a staggering toll.

**NARRATOR 1:** 102 had crossed the ocean.

**NARRATOR 2:** Three months later only 52 survived.

**NARRATOR 3:** The rest lay in unmarked graves outside the new settlement.

**NARRATOR 4:** Just when the winter seemed darkest, it broke, and then came spring.

**NARRATOR 1:** Finally, the Pilgrims were free to observe the beauty of the New World they had journeyed so far to see.

**NARRATOR 2:** The templed hills of America came to life with springtime, and all nature sang around them.

**NARRATOR 3:** After practically starving through the winter months, the Pilgrims were determined not to face another winter unprepared.

**NARRATOR 4:** But they knew nothing about farming in the New World.

**NARRATOR 1:** The crops of the old world failed here. It looked like starvation would claim them once the cold seasons came again.

**NARRATOR 2:** Ever since the pilgrims had arrived, they had caught faraway glimpses of curious visitors in the woods. Indians.

**NARRATOR 3:** The Pilgrims feared these savages, and for that reason had buried their dead in unmarked graves.

**NARRATOR 4:** They did not want the Indians to see how few their numbers had become in case they decided to attack.

**NARRATOR 1:** Now that spring had arrived, the Pilgrims moved into the few houses they had been able to construct.

**NARRATOR 2:** Their military officer, Miles Standish, kept a careful eye on the forests—aiming their cannons toward the wilderness.

**NARRATOR 3:** He predicted the Indians would come when they thought the Pilgrims were at their weakest point.

**NARRATOR 4:** He was right. The Indians did come when the Pilgrims were at their weakest point. But not as expected.

**NARRATOR 1:** One day, a lone warrior walked boldly into the middle of the Puritan settlement.

**NARRATOR 2:** The nervous pilgrims gathered around him. They wondered what his intentions were.

**NARRATOR 3:** But the Indian smiled, raised his arm, and greeted them in their own language.

**SAMOSET:** Welcome, Englishmen!

**NARRATOR 4:** This was definitely not what they had expected! Imagine their shock to hear a heathen savage speaking English to them.

**NARRATOR 1:** The Indian, whose name was Samoset, told them much. He said the leader of his tribe was the great chief, Massasoit.

**NARRATOR 2:** After a pleasant visit, Samoset vowed to return with his chief, and another Indian, who could speak even better English than him—one named Squanto.

**NARRATOR 3:** Samoset kept his word and returned with chief Massasoit and 60 other warriors.

**NARRATOR 4:** With fierce weapons and painted faces, they appeared every bit the savages that the stories had cast them as. But they came in peace.

**NARRATOR 1:** The Indian Squanto acted as their translator. The Pilgrims and Indians drafted a treaty of peace between them. Instead of seeing each other as enemies, they saw each other as fellow creatures of God.

**NARRATOR 2:** Amid their new peace with the Indians, the Pilgrims elected William Bradford as their new governor. Chief Massasoit sent Squanto to live with the Pilgrims.

**NARRATOR 3:** Squanto and Bradford became the best of friends. Squanto

explained that he knew English so fluently because he had been abducted from America and taken to Europe as a slave.

**NARRATOR 4:** Miraculously, he had managed to escape and work his way back to the New World.

**NARRATOR 1:** Squanto showed the Pilgrims how to plant Indian corn and how to fertilize it with rotting fish.

**NARRATOR 2:** He showed them the best places to catch fish and eels.

**NARRATOR 3:** Because of Squanto's help, the crops of the Pilgrims thrived. This year they would be well-prepared for winter.

**NARRATOR 4:** When autumn arrived, the trees changed with a vibrancy that the Pilgrims had never before witnessed in England. It was the perfect end to an arduous year.

**NARRATOR 1:** When the harvest had been gathered in, the Pilgrims summoned Massasoit and his warriors to a celebratory feast. Their bounty was one to be shared with others.

**NARRATOR 2:** The chief arrived with 100 of his warriors. Seating themselves upon rocks, stumps, or even the ground, together they feasted on the fruit of their labor.

**NARRATOR 3:** None of them knew it at the time, but it was a scene that would be re-enacted throughout the years.

**NARRATOR 4:** It was the first Thanksgiving.

**NARRATOR 1:** Through the rest of his life Squanto never left the Pilgrims. His friend, William Bradford, was there when he died.

Because of the help of the Native Americans, the Plymouth settlement survived.

**NARRATOR 2:** It went on to be a city on a hill for all others to emulate.

**NARRATOR 3:** Four hundred years later, we still celebrate these devout forefathers—as we worship in a country founded upon the principle of religious freedom.

**NARRATOR 4:** When you look at the voyage of the Pilgrims, their success in the New World was nothing short of a miracle. They had trials and tribulations to be sure, but in every situation they gave thanks.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

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1. You have probably heard this story before. Listening to the story this time, did you learn something new?
2. What is amazing about the pilgrim's journey? Explain.
3. What part did the pilgrim's faith play in their journey?
4. How important was the friendship between the pilgrims and the Native Americans?
5. Religious freedom has always been one of America's highest ideals. The founding fathers looked back to the pilgrims as the basis for their legislation protecting freedom of religion. How important are the pilgrims in our history? Explain.