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**A Weekly Column for the
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Thanking God for Our Blessings

Perhaps the most familiar story of the first Thanksgiving takes place in 1621 in Plymouth Colony, located in present-day Massachusetts. The Pilgrims, who celebrated their first Thanksgiving in America, were fleeing religious persecution from their homes in England. The Pilgrims set sail on Sept. 6, 1620, for the New World on a ship called the Mayflower.

The Pilgrim's first winter in the New World was devastating and many didn't survive to see spring. Of the 110 Pilgrims and crew that left England to find religious freedom, less than 50 survived the first winter. Once warmer weather appeared, the colonists made great strides in constructing their settlement and adapting to their new homes. However, the Pilgrims didn't learn everything they needed to know about surviving in this new land on their own. Native Americans taught the colonists how to tap the maple trees for sap, which plants were poisonous and which plants had medicinal powers, and how to plant Indian corn using fish to fertilize the crop.

With the helpful guidance of their Native American friends, colonists found themselves with enough corn, fruits, vegetables, fish packed in salt, and meat cured over smoky fires to store away for the winter. During this time, the early settlers had much to celebrate — they had built homes in the rustic landscape, raised enough crops to sustain their families over the long winter, and established relationships with the Native American neighbors. Against all odds, the Pilgrims had made a new home for themselves, and it was time to celebrate their achievement.

Pilgrim Governor William Bradford proclaimed that all colonists and their Native American friends gather for a day of thanksgiving. Approximately ninety braves attended the three-day celebration that included games, races, marches, and music — the Native Americans demonstrated their abilities with the bow and arrow and the Pilgrims demonstrated their musket skills.

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The tradition of celebrating thanksgiving after each harvest continued through the years. In the 1770s, during the American Revolution, a day of national thanksgiving was mentioned by the Continental Congress. Almost 40 years later, New York had adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom, and by the middle of the 19th century, other states caught on to the holiday. More than 200 years after the first thanksgiving, President Abraham Lincoln declared the final Thursday in November as a national day of thanksgiving. Congress finally made Thanksgiving Day an official national holiday in 1941.

The harvest-themed meal we have and share with our family and friends today on each Thanksgiving has become a symbol of the holiday. As we gather with our family and friends and share the Thanksgiving meal, let us pause and give thanks for the many blessings God has given us this past year.

However you spend your Thanksgiving, remember those Pilgrims who, through their undying faith, gave thanks for their blessings and shared them with those around them. If you have questions or comments about any issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.mo.gov.

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.

