



Thanksgiving

Introduction

It would be possible for a tourist visiting America for the first time in late November to look for the true significance and meaning of our Thanksgiving holiday without success. Like the national Feasts of the Old Testament era, our Thanksgiving celebrations have become more about feast and family than humble acknowledgement of a beneficent God who has providentially preserved and governed us with abundant grace and goodness. The 17th-century historical event that ultimately led to Abraham Lincoln's *Thanksgiving Proclamation* has become disconnected, intellectually and spiritually, from our modern celebrations. What happened with the Pilgrims and Native American Indians in November of 1621 is no longer the preeminent foundation

Introduction

for the festivities that will take place in thousands of homes across our land this coming Thursday. However, this does not have to be true of us.

By remembering the *Mayflower*, those who participated in the first Thanksgiving, Lincoln's *Thanksgiving Proclamation*, and the clear teaching of God's Word, let us seek to repair our own broken foundations and have our hearts stirred to remember and give thanks to the only living and true God. It is a wonderful privilege and honor to bow in adoration and humble thanksgiving before the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and to acknowledge Him as the Source of all temporal and spiritual blessings.



English Separatists in Leiden, Netherlands

- In 1608, a group of English separatists moved to Amsterdam and, the next year, to Leiden to escape persecution. Mr. John Robinson (1575-1625) was their pastor, and Mr. William Brewster assisted him as a ruling elder. (Note: Rembrandt was born in Leiden in 1606).
- By 1620, a score or more of Congregational ministers had found haven in the Dutch Netherlands.
- They lived in Leiden for 11 or 12 years. “These English have lived among us now these 12 years and yet we never had any suit, or accusation come against any of them.”
- Their lives in Leiden were extremely difficult: They were losing their language, unable to educate their children as they had been educated in England, the work was hard, etc.



Their Sights on Virginia

- Two men, Robert Cushman and John Carver, were chosen and sent to England to solicit The Virginia Company of London to grant them a patent. They were persuaded to make the voyage, though they did not receive any public seal or promise that they would not be harassed.
- A letter from John Robinson to the His Majesty's Privy Council for Virginia states: "We verily believe and trust the Lord is with us, unto whom, and whose service we have given ourselves in many trials; and that He will graciously prosper our endeavors according to the simplicity of our hearts therein" (Leiden, December 15, 1617).
- They sought the Lord's will by holding a public and solemn fast.



Preparation for the Voyage

- Families began selling their homes and preparing for the journey.
- The *Speedwell* was bought and fitted in Holland to assist the *Mayflower* in transporting the people to America.
- The travelers were accompanied by the rest of their congregation (who were not going) to Delfshaven, where the ship was ready to receive them.
- They were pilgrims, a word taken from Hebrews 11:13 (Geneva Bible):
“All these died in faith, and received not the promises, but saw them afar off, and believed them, and received them thankfully, and confessed that they were strangers and **pilgrims** on the earth.”

About the Mayflower

- The *Speedwell* hoisted sail around the 22nd of July and headed for Southampton where the *Mayflower* would be waiting for them.
- The 180-ton *Mayflower* sailed from Plymouth on September 6, 1620, with 102 people plus officers and 20 to 30 crew (and two dogs).
- 41 were from Leiden and 61 “strangers” from Southampton and London.
- 14 indentured servants and hired artisans were on board.



William Bradford
Governor and Historian of Plymouth Colony



The Voyage

“The *Mayflower* colonists were in almost constant peril of their lives, especially when a fierce storm ‘bowed and cracked’ the main beam of the ship. Yet the ‘saints’ of Leiden met their daily hazards ‘with answerable courage.’ Their fortitude lay in the fact that, as William Bradford unforgettably put it, ‘they knew they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens, their dearest country, and quieted their spirits.’”



The *Mayflower* at sea. Hand-colored woodcut of a 19th century illustration.



NORTH
AMERICA

Plymouth colony

Plymouth, England

EUROPE

ATLANTIC
OCEAN

- Planned route of the Mayflower to Virginia colony
- - - Actual route of the Mayflower
- Gulf Stream ocean current**

0 mi 1,000 2,000
0 km 1,000 2,000



Landing at Cape Cod

The *Mayflower* arrived at Cape Cod on November 9, 1620. The voyage across the Atlantic had taken 66 days.

“Being thus arrived in a good harbor and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof; again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element.”

- William Bradford



Mayflower in Plymouth Harbor, by William Halsall, 1882

About the Mayflower II

- The *Mayflower II* is a replica of the 17th century ship that brought the Pilgrims to America.
- It was built in Upham Shipyard in Brixham, Devon, England in 1955-56.
- It is 106 feet long by 25 feet wide, 236 tons displacement, three masts (mainmast, foremast, mizzen), a bowsprit and 6 sails.
- It was sailed across the Atlantic from Plymouth on April 20, 1957, arriving at Plymouth on June 22 (64 days).



The Pilgrim Fathers landed in Plymouth, and gave thanks. The *Mayflower* is in the inset circle.





The Landing of the Pilgrims: The Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. Artist: Constantino Brumidi (1805-1880)

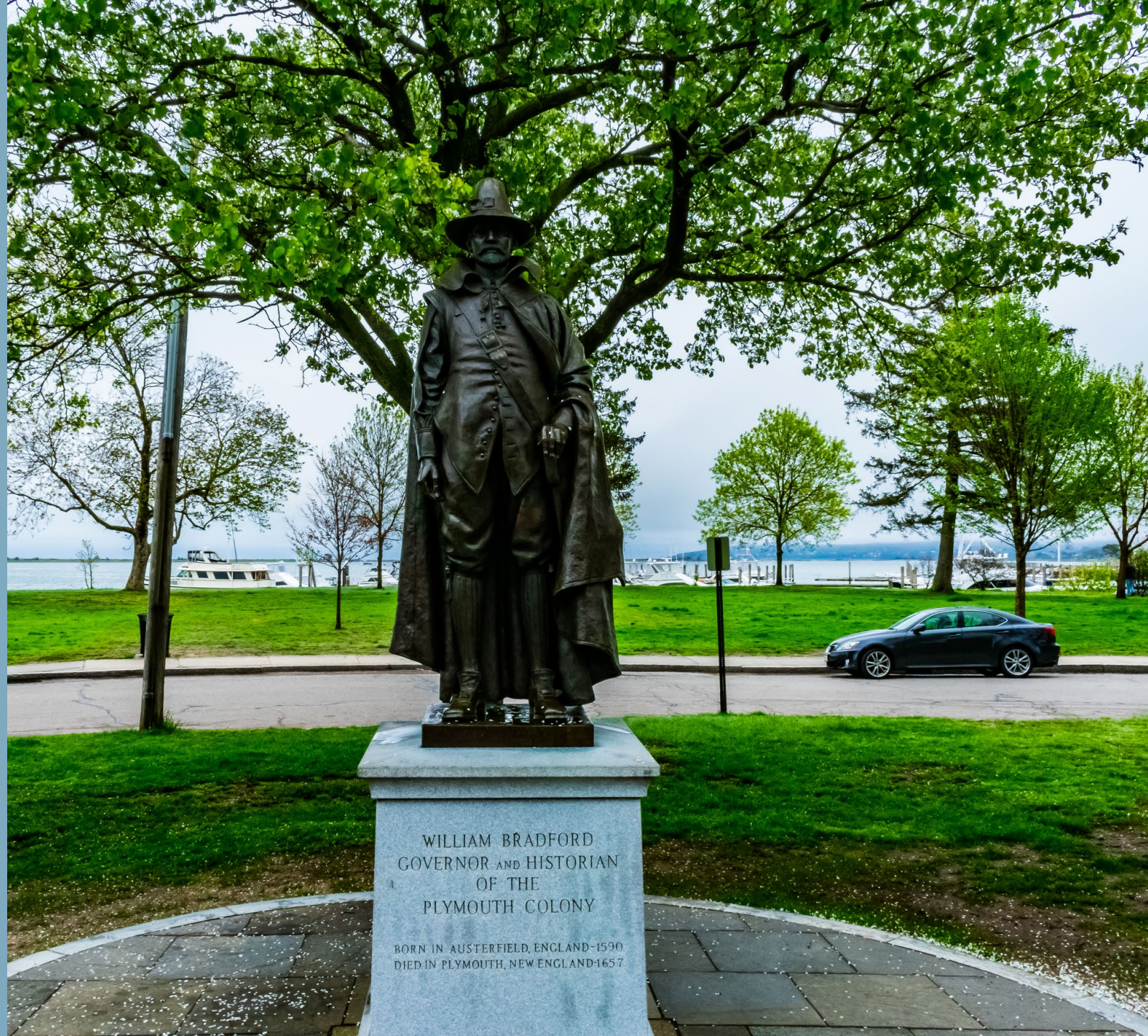
The Mayflower Compact

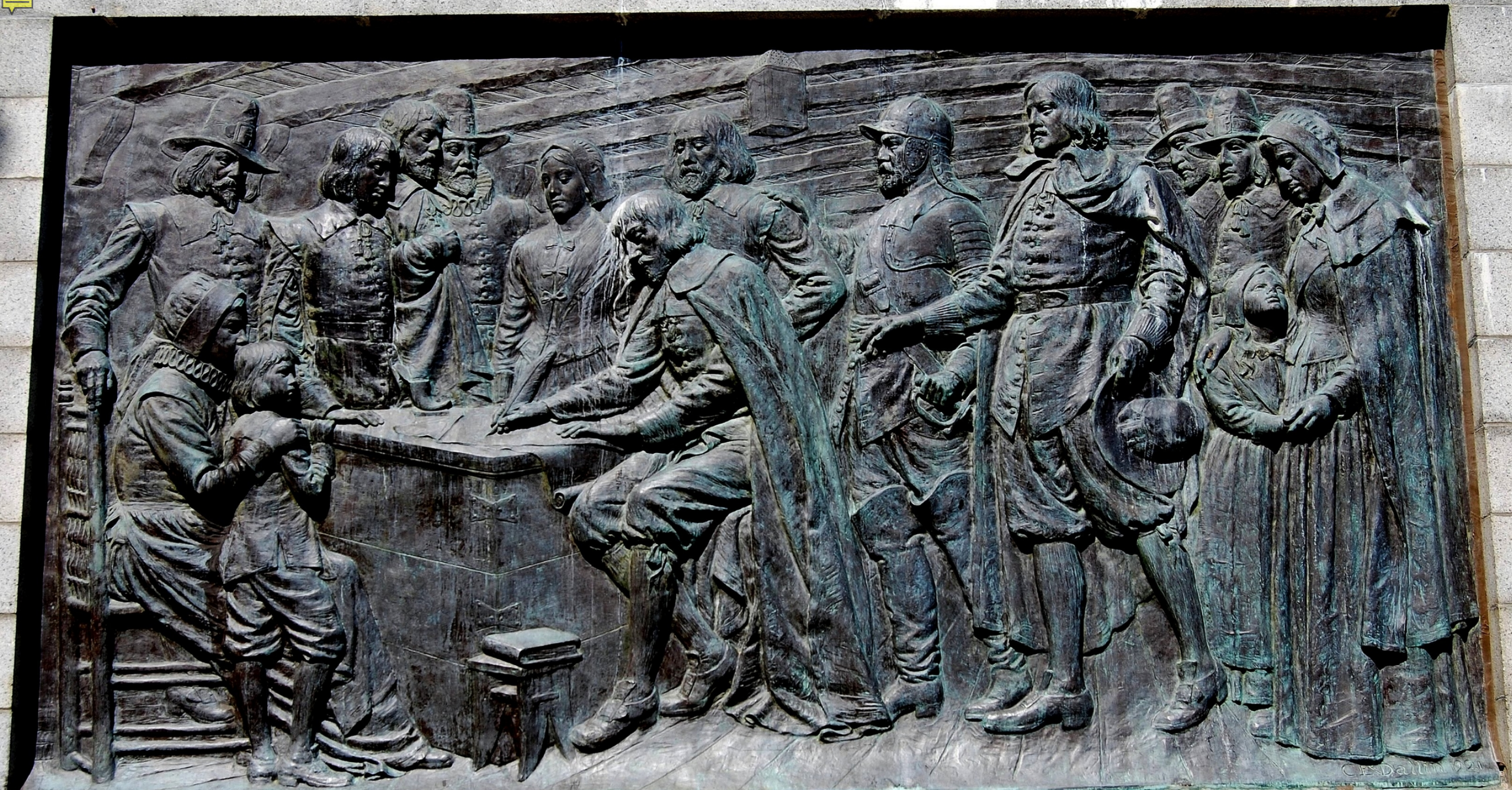
- The Pilgrims arrived off the coast of Massachusetts on November 9, 1620.
- The Pilgrim leaders drafted an agreement, the *Mayflower Compact*, which was signed in the cabin of the *Mayflower* by 41 adults on November 21, 1620, in what is now Provincetown Harbor near Cape Cod.
- The *Compact* was, in essence, a social contract in which the settlers consented to follow the rules and regulations of the government for the sake of survival.
- The *Compact* remained in force for 71 years until their colony at Plymouth was absorbed into the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1691.

William Bradford

1590-1657

Mr. William Bradford was unanimously chosen as the governor of the plantation after the death of Governor John Carver in April, 1621. He served as governor of Plymouth Colony for a total of thirty-three years.





Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown, MA. The signing of the Mayflower Compact

In y^e name of god Amen. We whose names are underwritten,
the loyall subjects of our dread Soueraigne Lord King James
by y^e grace of god, of great Britaine, franc, & yreland King,
defondor of y^e faith, &c

Haueing undertaken, for y^e glorie of god, and aduancements
of y^e christian^{faith}, and honour of our king & countrie, a voyagd to
plant y^e first Colonie in y^e Northern parts of Virginia. Doe
by these presents solemnly & mutually in y^e presence of god, and
one of another, Couenant, & combine our selues together into a
Ciuiill body politick; for ~~our~~ better ordering, & preservation & fur-
therance of y^e ends aforesaid; and by vertue hereof to enacte,
constitute, and frame such just & equall Lawes, ordinances,
Acts, constitutions, & offices, from time to time, as shall be thought
most meeet & conuenient for y^e generall good of y^e Colonie: vnto
which we promise all due submission and obedienco. In witness
whereof we haue herevnder subscribed our names at Cap-
Codd y^e .11. of Nouember, in y^e year of y^e raigne of our soueraigne
Lord King James of England, franc & yreland & eighteenth

The *Mayflower Compact*

“In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord King James, by the Grace of God of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, etc. having undertaken, for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian Faith and Honour of our King and Country, a Voyage to plant the First Colony in the Northern Parts of Virginia, do by these present solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, Covenant and Combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politic, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute and frame such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions and Offices, from time

The *Mayflower Compact*

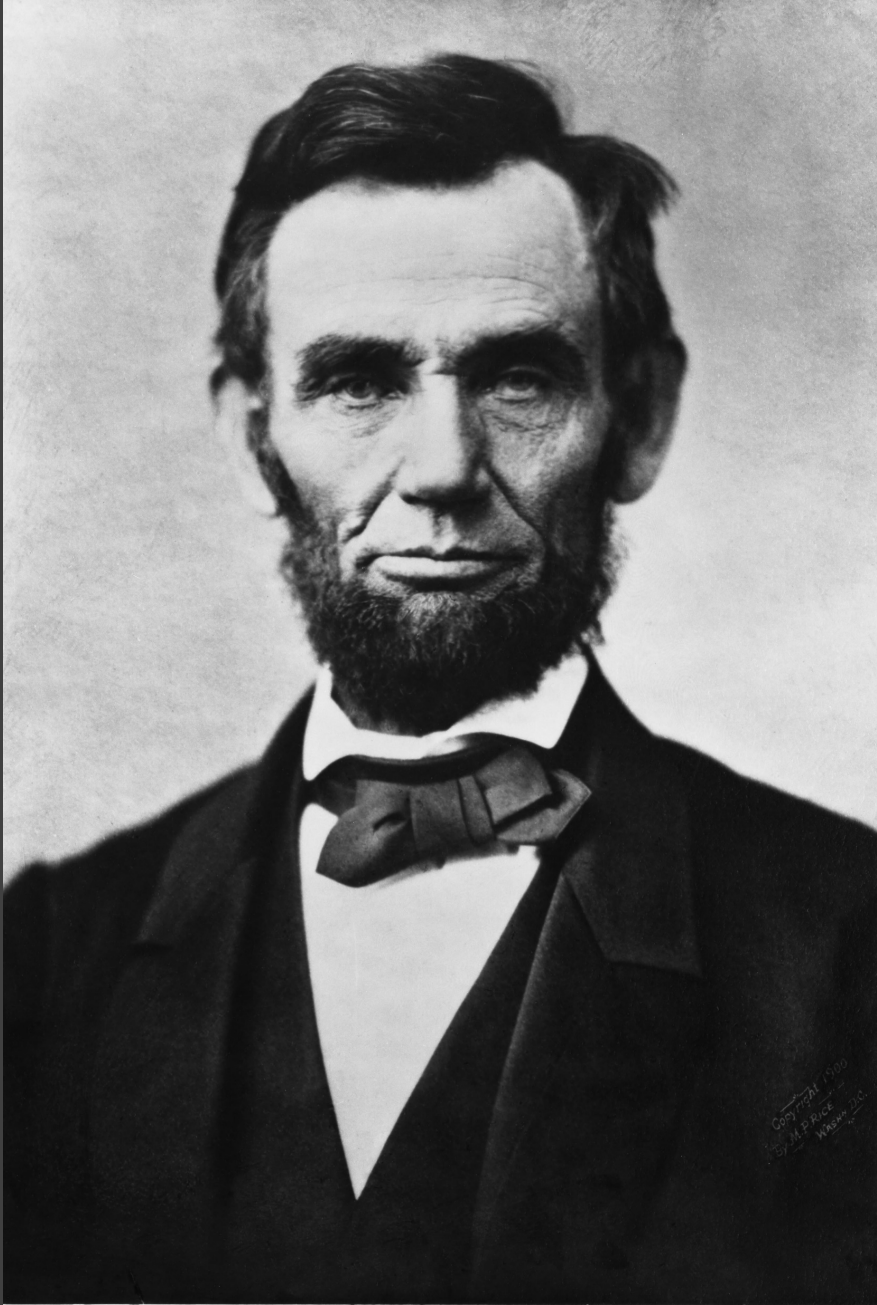
to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the 11th of November [New style, November 21], in the year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord King James, of England, France and Ireland the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth. Anno Domini 1620.”

The First Thanksgiving

- The first Thanksgiving was held about a year after the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock.
- An English-speaking Indian by the name of Squanto offered his services to the Pilgrims, teaching them how to grow corn and fish.
- By the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims had established peace with all the neighboring Indian tribes.
- Edward Winslow wrote, “...our harvest being gotten in, our Governour sent foure men on fowling, that so we might after a more special manner reioyce together...”
- Some 90 Indians celebrated with the 53 surviving Pilgrims at the settlement, including King Massasoit.
- The celebration lasted for three days.



Jennie Augusta Brownscombe
1850 – 1936



Lincoln's *Thanksgiving Proclamation*

President Abraham Lincoln

1809 - 1865

Thanksgiving Proclamation

“The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except

Thanksgiving Proclamation

in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battlefield; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of

Thanksgiving Proclamation

freedom. 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, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the

Thanksgiving Proclamation

ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand 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.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed.



Thanksgiving Proclamation

Done at the City of Washington, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-eighth.

By the President: Abraham Lincoln

William H. Seward,
Secretary of State

Note: In 1941, Congress passed a resolution establishing the fourth Thursday of November as the Federal Thanksgiving Day holiday. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the resolution on December 26, 1941.

How to Prepare Our Hearts for Thanksgiving

- By examining the life of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that developing the **habit of thankfulness** needs to be a part of our daily lives.
- Like the one leper, we should return to the Lord with gratitude when He does **extraordinary things** on our behalf.
- Our gratitude to God will almost certainly be in **proportion to our sense of feeling unworthily blessed**.
- Gratitude is first and foremost **our duty**, whether we are emotionally invested or not. “In everything give thanks” involves the volitional side of our being and demonstrates that we trust His Word.
- Gratitude is to be directed to God for “all things” and is an acknowledgement that **God knows and does all things well for His own glory and for our good**.



Oswald Chambers

"In everything give thanks. Never let anything push you to your wits' end, because you will get worried, and worry makes you self-interested and disturbs the nourishment of the life of God. Give thanks to God that *He* is there, no matter what is happening. Many a man has found God in the belly of hell in the trenches during the days of war, i.e., they came to their wits' end and discovered God. The secret of Christian quietness is not indifference, but the knowledge that God is my Father, He loves me, I shall never think of anything He will forget, and worry becomes an impossibility."



An Old Story About the King

“The king was so unhappy that he dispatched one of his men to go on a trip to find a happy man. He ordered him, ‘When you find the happy man, purchase his shirt and bring it back to me that I might wear it and also be happy.’ For years the king’s man traveled and searched. He could not find a happy man. Finally, one day when he was walking in one of the poorer sections of one of the most impoverished countries, he heard a man singing at the top of his voice. He followed the sound and found a man who was plowing a field. He asked the plowman, ‘Are you happy?’ The plowman replied, ‘I have never known a day of unhappiness.’

The king’s representative then told the plowman the purpose of the mission. The plowman laughed uproariously as he replied, ‘Why, man, I don’t have a shirt!’”



Gratefulness

Thou that hast giv'n so much to me,
Give one thing more, a grateful heart.

Wherefore I cry, and cry again;
And in no quiet canst thou be,
Till I a thankful heart obtain of thee:

Not thankful, when it pleaseth me;
As if thy blessings had spare days:
But such a heart, whose pulse may be Thy praise.

- George Herbert (1593-1633)

Selections from *Gratefulness*

Gratitude Expressed

- “**In everything give thanks**; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thess. 5:18).
- “One of the lepers fell on his face at Jesus’ feet...and **gave thanks**” (Luke 17:16).
- When Paul considers the question, “Who will set me free from this body of death?” he acknowledges his wretchedness...and **gives thanks** (Rom. 7:24-25).
- When Paul writes about the Christian’s walk, he exhorts the Ephesians to “**always give thanks** for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God even the Father” (Eph. 5:20).

Gratitude Expressed

- Paul instructs the Colossians: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** through Him to God the Father” (Col. 3:17).
- At the Last Supper, Jesus “took a cup and **gave thanks**, and gave it to them saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you’” (Mt. 26:27).
- “So they took away the stone [from Lazarus’s tomb]. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I **thank You** that You have heard Me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out’” (John 11:41-43).

The Mother of Gratitude: Memory

- **God's mercy** was extended to us in the past (salvation through His son, Jesus Christ; a provision; healing; answered prayer; protection; guidance; wisdom, etc.).
- At the time of His activity on our behalf, our **minds were imprinted with His goodness.**
- Gratitude begins by **recalling the memory** and **thanking God once again.**



Praying Hands

Albrecht Dürer
1471-1528

Chesterton on *Gratitude*



G.K. Chesterton with his wife, Frances Blogg

1874 - 1936

“I would maintain that thanks are
the highest form of thought, and
that gratitude is happiness
doubled by wonder.”

- G.K. Chesterton

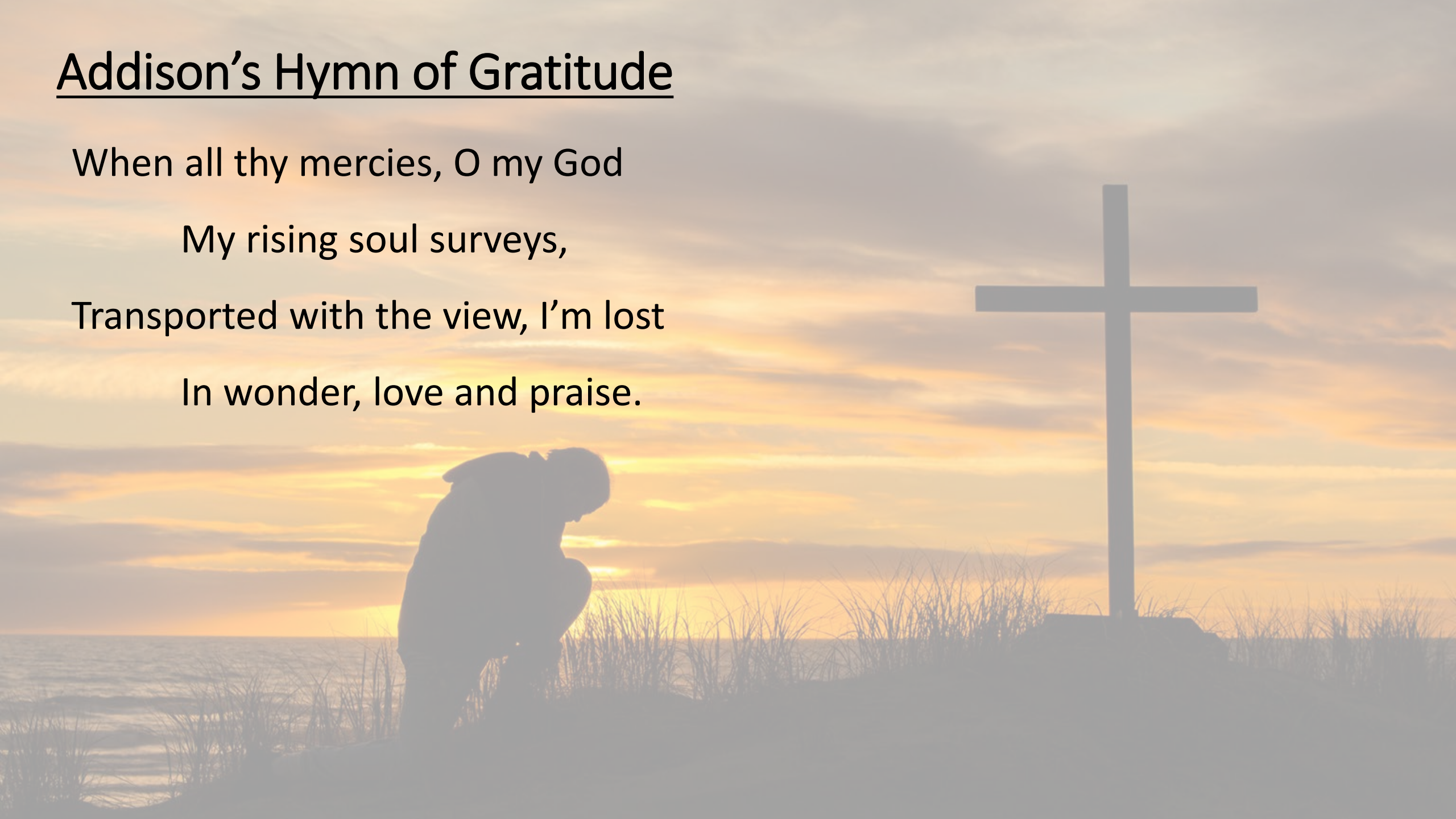
Addison's Hymn of Gratitude

When all thy mercies, O my God

My rising soul surveys,

Transported with the view, I'm lost

In wonder, love and praise.



O how can words with equal warmth
The gratitude declare,
That glows within my ravished heart?
But thou canst read it there.



Ten thousand thousand precious gifts

My daily thanks employ;

Nor is the least a cheerful heart

That tastes those gifts with joy.



Through every period of my life
Thy goodness I'll pursue;
And after death, in distant worlds,
The glorious theme renew.

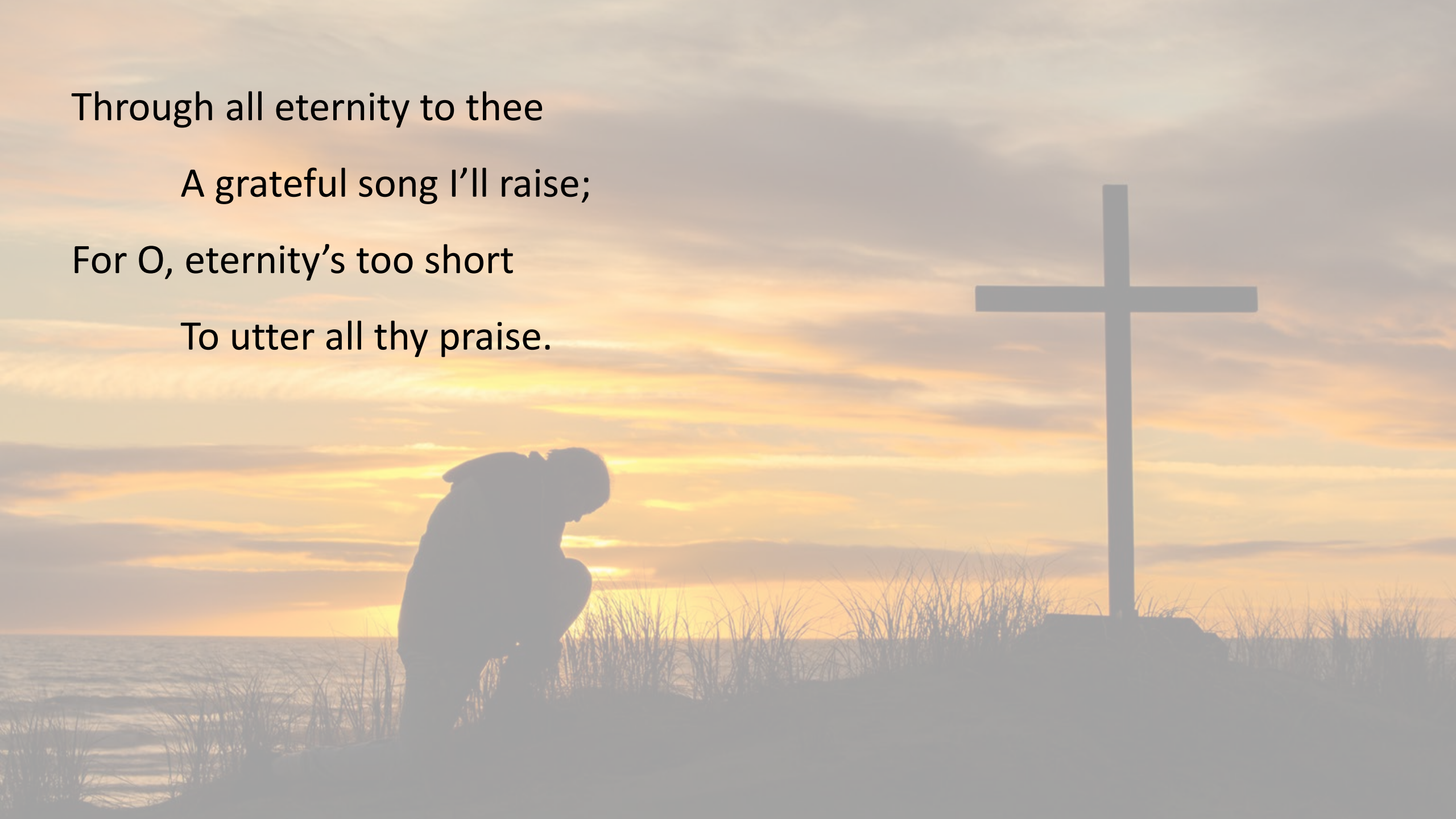


Through all eternity to thee

A grateful song I'll raise;

For O, eternity's too short

To utter all thy praise.





HAPPY
THANKSGIVING