

# About Thanksgiving

[ Excerpt from Wallbuilders.com ]

Much of the credit for the adoption of Thanksgiving as an annual national holiday may be attributed to **Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale**, the editor of *Godey's Lady's Book*, a popular lady's books containing poetry, art work, and articles by America's leading authors. For two decades, she promoted the idea of a national Thanksgiving Day, contacting president after president until Abraham Lincoln responded in 1863 by setting aside the last Thursday of that November.

The Thanksgiving proclamation issued by Lincoln was remarkable not only for its strong religious content but also for its timing, for it was delivered in the midst of the darkest days of the Civil War, with the Union having lost battle after battle throughout the first three years of that conflict. Yet, despite those dark circumstances, Lincoln nevertheless called Americans to prayer with an air of positive optimism and genuine thankfulness, noting that:

**The year that is drawing toward 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 can not fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God. 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.**

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That remarkable Thanksgiving Proclamation came at a pivotal point in Lincoln's spiritual life. Three months earlier, the Battle of Gettysburg had occurred, resulting in the loss of some 60,000 American lives. It had been while Lincoln was walking among the thousands of graves there at Gettysburg that he first committed his life to Christ. As he later explained to a clergyman:

**When I left Springfield [Illinois, to assume the Presidency], I asked the people to pray for me. I was not a Christian. When I buried my son, the severest trial of my life, I was not a Christian. But when I went to Gettysburg and saw the graves of thousands of our soldiers, I then and there consecrated myself to Christ.**

The dramatic spiritual impact resulting from that experience was not only visible in Lincoln's Thanksgiving Day proclamation (and also his 1864 call for a day of prayer and fasting) but especially in his 1865 Second Inaugural Address.

Over the seventy-five years following Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation, presidents faithfully followed Lincoln's precedent, annually declaring a national Thanksgiving Day (but the date of the celebrations varied widely from proclamation to proclamation). In 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt began celebrating Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday of each November, and in 1941, Congress permanently established that day as the national Thanksgiving holiday.

As you celebrate Thanksgiving this year, remember to retain the original gratefulness to God that has always been the spirit of this – the oldest of all American holidays.

*Happy Thanksgiving, 2022*