

# The First Thanksgiving

**T**he Pilgrims left England because they wanted to be free to practice their own religion. First they headed to Holland, hoping their religious practice would be allowed, but they soon had to leave there as well.

The Pilgrims sailed from Holland to America in 1620. The ride over in the *Mayflower* was crowded, food and water supplies were low, and disease spread among the people. Many Pilgrims died on the long trip. The passengers had no rooms to themselves. They spent their days and nights on the floor or wherever they could find room. There were no bathrooms, and no privacy at all.

The trip took three long months. When they finally sighted land, the Pilgrims were very happy. They arrived in December. The people had to live on their ship until houses were built on land. More people died during the harsh, cold winter.

The Native Americans who were living nearby wanted to help the Pilgrims. They sent Squanto, a Native American who spoke English, to talk to the Pilgrims. Soon the Native Americans were helping the Pilgrims plant seeds, hunt, and fish. They helped the remaining Pilgrim settlers stay alive. To show their gratitude, the Pilgrims and Native Americans held a three-day feast in late November, serving such foods as fish, popcorn, breads, meats, and vegetables.

Today we celebrate Thanksgiving on the fourth Thursday in November. We remember and honor the Pilgrims, and the Native Americans who helped them survive.

