

You May Be Surprised to Know the First Thanksgiving Was Actually in 1565 in Florida

As we celebrate Thanksgiving today, it's important to understand the truth about its origins. Many believe the first American Thanksgiving was the harvest festival the Pilgrims hosted in October 1621 at the Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts. But actually, the first Thanksgiving was 66 years earlier in St. Augustine, Florida.

When the Spanish landed in August of 1565, they named their city St. Augustine because it was on the feast day of St. Augustine. Accounts say that the Spanish came off their ships with trumpets blaring. Priests who had joined the voyage celebrated the first mass in the New World. They also took some of their provisions off the ship and held a feast—a feast of Thanksgiving.

A large cross now marks the spot where the Spanish thanked God for their safe passage to the New World. St. Augustine locals like to say it's the largest cross in North America.

Members of the Timucua tribe were nearby when the Spanish landed, so they joined the newcomers for their Thanksgiving feast. Their food, unfortunately, was probably not as delicious as the foods we eat for Thanksgiving today. Instead of freshly cooked Turkey and mashed potatoes, the Thanksgiving feast of 1565 likely consisted of hard biscuits, some wild game, garbanzo stew and red wine—leftover provisions from the long voyage from Spain.

Fast-forward 60 years and you have the well-known Thanksgiving of 1621 in Plymouth. The Pilgrims—who called themselves separatists and came to the New World seeking religious freedom—befriended the Native Americans who lived nearby. The

Native Americans taught the Pilgrims how to farm, and because the crop was so plentiful that year, the two groups joined for a feast of celebration and gratitude to God.

The Thanksgiving story in St. Augustine is interesting to me because I live in Florida. But the Thanksgiving in Plymouth is special to me because I've found out that I'm actually a descendant of William Brewster. I found this out through my cousin Sharon Holmgren, who is as interested in genealogy as I am. My mother, Amy Strang, is a descendant of Brewster's son Jonathan.

If you don't already know, Brewster was the elder who was in charge of the Plymouth colony. He came over to the New World with his family, and sadly, a couple of his children died. He went on to live to be 78 years old, which was a long time in his day. Brewster acted as ruling elder from 1609 to his death in 1644, and as ruling elder, he was also head of their government.

But why is this important? I believe it's good to have a fresh perspective on Thanksgiving as we celebrate today. It's good to research these historical events for ourselves since even textbooks aren't always correct.

Yet no matter what the history is, the most important thing is that we as Spirit-filled believers take the opportunity today to offer God a sincere attitude of gratitude. I hope as you gather with family and friends to have a nice meal and relax away from work that you remember what this holiday is all about.

Share this article with a friend today so they, too, can have a fresh perspective and appreciation for Thanksgiving. You can also listen to my podcast about this topic, where I go more in depth about the historical origins of this Christian holiday.

May God bless you and your family as you celebrate!