

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name... (Psalm 100:4)*

Thanksgiving is not a Church holiday. That's not to say the celebration is not in some way connected with the faith of people past or present. But, unlike Christmas or Easter, it was never a Church feast day that has somehow been 'secularized.' The history of Thanksgiving is debated, but over centuries communities and governments have proclaimed days of thanksgiving. Today, an official day of thanksgiving is celebrated only in a handful of nations. In the US, Thanksgiving became a legal holiday following a proclamation by President Lincoln in 1863. However, it wasn't until 1942 that President Roosevelt and Congress agreed to standardize the current date for Thanksgiving (the fourth Thursday in November), which Roosevelt had tried to move a little earlier in an attempt to "boost the economy" by giving an extra week of Christmas shopping.

Even if Thanksgiving itself isn't a Church holiday, we still take the opportunity to gather together as a community of faith the evening before Thanksgiving. Our gathering is an opportunity to express our thanks and praise to God for all that he has done for us, just as so many Psalms, songs, and Christian writings throughout the centuries do as well.

The Christian Church has always recognized God as the source of all good gifts. When we speak the first article of the Creed – that we believe in "God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," – we confess that "God has made me and all creatures, that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all that I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."

But, our thanks and praise don't come to God simply for earthly blessings. When we speak of our faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we recognize that God desires to give us his spiritual mercies as well. We confess that Jesus Christ "redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil." We believe in the Holy Spirit who "has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

What God has done for us by caring for our bodies pales in comparison to what he has done for us spiritually. Yet, all of this looks forward to that final day when Jesus will return to make all things new. Ultimately, we thank and praise God because the final harvest is yet to come, when his holy angels will gather us to him to dwell with him in "everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." Then, with David we will say forever, *With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O Lord, for it is good. For he has delivered me from every trouble* (Psalm 54:6–7).

-Pastor Squire

"Even so, Lord, quickly come to Thy final harvest home; gather Thou Thy people in, free from sorrow, free from sin, there, forever purified, in Thy garner to abide; come with all Thine angels, come, raise the glorious harvest home."

("Come, Ye Thankful People, Come," *LSB* 892, v. 4)