

George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Thanksgiving

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/george-washington-abraham-lincoln-and-thanksgiving>

Comforting words for a new nation and for a time when it was torn by civil war.



(photo: Photo illustration by Melissa Hartog)

November 22, 2018

In response to a joint request by both Houses of Congress, on Oct. 3, 1789, President George Washington proclaimed Nov. 26, 1789, as a day of “public thanksgiving and prayer” devoted to “the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be.”

Here is the full text of President Washington’s 1789 Thanksgiving proclamation:

By the President of the United States of America, a Proclamation.

Whereas **it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor**; and — Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me “to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by **acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God**, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness:”

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that **great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be**; that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and **humble thanks for His kind care and protection** of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favor, able interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war; for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted; for the **civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed**, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most **humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord** and Ruler of Nations, and beseech Him to **pardon our national and other transgressions**; to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually; to render our National Government a blessing to all the people by constantly being a Government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed; to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness to us), and to bless them with good governments, peace, and concord; **to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue**, and the increase of science among them and us; and, generally, to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

George Washington

On Oct. 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued his own Thanksgiving proclamation. In it, he invited a nation “in the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity” to observe Nov. 26, 1863, “as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens,” and to “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, tranquillity and Union.”

Here is the full text of President Lincoln’s 1863 Thanksgiving proclamation:

By the President of the United States of America.

A 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 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 battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of 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 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, tranquillity and Union.

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

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