# Why Thanksgiving is on the Last Thursday in November 

From the beginning, America has proclaimed national days of thanksgiving. In November of 1783, Congress proclaimed:
> "[S]et apart the second Thursday in December next, as a day of public thanksgiving, that all the people may then assemble to celebrate with one voice grateful hearts and united voices, the praises of their Supreme and all bountiful Benefactor, for his numberless favors and mercies. That he hath been pleased to conduct us in safety through all the perils and vicissitudes of the war; that he hath given us unanimity and resolution to adhere to our just rights; that he hath raised up a powerful ally to assist us in supporting them, and hath so far crowned our united efforts with success, that in the course of the present year, hostilities have ceased, and we are left in the undisputed possession of our liberties and independence..."

There were other times of thanksgiving, but the official Thanksgiving celebration didn't move to the last Thursday of November until 1864 as the result of President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation on October 20 of that same year. Here it is:

## By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation
"It has pleased Almighty God to prolong our national life another year, defending us with His guardian care against unfriendly designs from abroad and vouchsafing to us in His mercy many and signal victories over the enemy, who is of our own household. It has also pleased our Heavenly Father to favor as well our citizens in their homes as our
soldiers in their camps and our sailors on the rivers and seas with unusual health. He has largely augmented our free population by emancipation and by immigration, $\boxtimes$ while He has opened to us new sources of wealth and has crowned the labor of our workingmen in every department of industry with abundant rewards. Moreover, He has been pleased to animate and inspire our minds and hearts with fortitude, courage, and resolution sufficient for the great trial of civil war into which we have been brought by our adherence as a nation to the cause of freedom and humanity, and to afford to us reasonable hopes of an ultimate and happy deliverance from all our dangers and afflictions:

Now, therefore, I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, do hereby appoint and set apart the last Thursday in November next as a day which I desire to be observed by all my fellow-citizens, wherever they may then be, as a day of thanksgiving and praise to Almighty God, the beneficent Creator and Ruler of the Universe. And I do further recommend to my fellow-citizens aforesaid that on that occasion they do reverently humble themselves in the dust and from thence offer up penitent and fervent prayers and supplications to the Great Disposer of Events for a return of the inestimable blessings of peace, union, and harmony throughout the land which it has pleased Him to assign as a dwelling place for ourselves and for our posterity throughout all generations.

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 20th day of October, A.D. 1864, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-ninth."

## ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

It would probably come as a shock to the public for a modern president to so aggressively make a claim for the need for thanks and humility to God, but such was the culture of America that such a proclamation was seen as normal and expected until very recently.

