

Editorial: What should an alien know about Thanksgiving?

November 26, 2019

We often wonder what aliens visiting Earth would think of the things we do or what archaeologists 1,000 years from now will think about us based on what they find.

Asking what an alien or archaeologist *would* think is one question, but if Thanksgiving means anything at all, a better question is what *should* they know about Thanksgiving?

What our culture “knows” about Thanksgiving

If the places we shop or the TV we watch are any indication, our extraterrestrial visitors or distant descendants might think Thanksgiving is about turkey decorations, parades and football.

With respect to football, I’m at a loss for how to explain the connection between Thanksgiving and football or between turkeys, cowboys and lions. Maybe aliens and archaeologists can help explain this connection.

I’m also not sure why Thanksgiving warrants such an elaborate parade. [A little research](#) reveals the famous parade started in the 1920s—when so much was booming in the United States—with the purpose of bringing shoppers to New York City’s largest department store just in time for Christmas shopping. What a cynical thing to do with Thanksgiving!

Come to think of it, our cultural observance of Thanksgiving is thoroughly cynical: depicting the main course as a cute cartoon, stuffing ourselves

silly, pretending Anglos and Native Americans have been nothing but friends since the hallowed original feast, not to mention the parade and football.

Adding to the cultural accumulation is the trope of the dysfunctional family trying to sit at a table together long enough to stuff themselves silly without much thought of the people who would give anything to be with family no longer at the table.

What children know about Thanksgiving

Our culture really isn't much help in understanding Thanksgiving. There's too much (money) at stake at this point to peel the onion and return to any original intent for the annual celebration.

Can we find help anywhere else in answering what aliens and archaeologists should know about Thanksgiving?

I asked a handful of young people a version of this question. I simplified my question so they didn't get distracted with their own questions about aliens or wondering, "What's an arkeelojist?"

I asked, "What should people know about Thanksgiving?"

I've recorded their answers below. Their names are changed to protect the innocent.

"The main thing is to really be thankful for everything." - Lindsey, 9

"The pilgrims and the Native Americans became friends." - Lacey, 11

"And had a feast together." - Leticia, 8

“Thanksgiving is a big feast at dinner. The Pilgrims came to America on the Mayflower. Squanto taught the Pilgrims to grow food. The Native Americans decided to have a big feast with the Pilgrims, and they told Squanto that.” - Nick, 6

“If you’re going somewhere else for Thanksgiving, you should just put up your Christmas tree before you leave. And if you have a friend who is a farmer, and it’s Thanksgiving, you should just ask them for a turkey.” - Clark, 8

“If you don’t eat food, you die.” - Samuel, 6

“Good food.” - Alex, 13

“It’s not about food, where you are or what you do. It’s about being together.” - Candace, 9

“People should spend time with their family and be thankful to God for things. Be thankful for our family and for God and for friends.” - Ophelia, 9

“We need to thank God for everything we have, like God, family and trees because they give us oxygen. We should just be thankful for the things that we have like food and shelter instead of being greedy and wanting everything.” - Gwen, 11

Oddly enough, football, parades and turkey decorations didn’t make the list of things these young people think should be known about Thanksgiving.

What should be known about Thanksgiving

Though our children do reflect our culture—how could they not since we

are their teachers and models—they still have enough innocence to pull us back to a simpler understanding of what we are doing on Thanksgiving Day.

According to [the earliest account](#), the purpose of the first Thanksgiving celebration, which took place in 1621, was to express gratitude for “the goodness of God” that kept the Pilgrim settlers “so far from want.” To express this gratitude, the settlers brought together their plentiful food and shared it.

Despite all the cultural accumulation that obscures the original intent, despite [tragic historic realities](#) that mock the original intent, the kernel of Thanksgiving still holds. That kernel is that we should stop to acknowledge “the goodness of God” that keeps us “so far from want.”

Our stopping should be for joyful sharing. It should include peeling off what our culture has added. And it should include [acknowledging wrongs and our part in them](#).

Thanksgiving should be gratitude pure and simple, a profound thankfulness for the things we have, while also guarding against “being greedy and wanting everything.”

Our culture teaches us to want everything and to be satisfied with nothing. But our God, the source and lifeblood of all thanksgiving, teaches us—and possible aliens and future archaeologists—that goodness, mercy and love unending is found in simple trust in him.

All creatures look to you
to give them their food at the proper time.
When you give it to them,
they gather it up;
when you open your hand,
they are satisfied with good things.

(Psalm 104:27-28)

Eric Black is the executive director, publisher and editor of the Baptist Standard. He can be reached at eric.black@baptiststandard.com or on Twitter at [@EricBlackBSP](https://twitter.com/EricBlackBSP). The views expressed are those solely of the author.