

A MICHIGAN THANKSGIVING

By Bob Young

Thanksgiving, 2009

When our family was still four in number instead of the eventual five, we moved to Michigan. Our older son was 3 years, our younger son 3 months. We were 1000 miles away from family and all we had known previously. Although we felt a little lonely the first Thanksgiving, new friends and new experiences helped to fill the gap. It snowed 20 inches on Thanksgiving weekend and any feelings of self-pity were quickly buried as we took on the task of dealing with the snow and helping others. (I had seen 20 inches of snow before, when I was growing up in Kansas, but it was really 2-3 inches in drifts of 20 inches and even more.) The second Thanksgiving, my mom and stepdad came to visit, and the holiday was delightful. The feelings of loneliness were temporarily stayed.

By the time our third Thanksgiving in Michigan approached, reality set in. After two years in the Detroit area, we had moved to a new work in Lansing and lived in a small house next door to the church building. As Thanksgiving approached, we were aware that we would not spend any holiday time with extended family. We decided that we had the opportunity to establish our own family traditions, and perhaps to experience in some small way what the Pilgrims experienced at the first Thanksgiving.

Of course, we had not gone through the dangers and disease of being on a ship for three months. And our family was not totally inaccessible—only 20 hours away by car! We did not have to worry about shelter or building a fortress against the coming winter weather (which had already set in!). We did not have to worry about freezing to death in a winter we were not prepared for. The supermarkets were well-stocked and looked a lot like the supermarkets we had known before—only with different, strange names. The snow was deeper—a lot deeper—but manageable. But the fact remained—we were far away from our roots and our extended family. And in that way, we understood what the Pilgrims might have felt.

We decided to take their example and spend the time with friends. Even though we were a long way from our physical family, we had become part of a wonderful, loving spiritual family. We could connect with one another in our little family—mom, dad, and three sons. We also connected with lots of new friends and new brothers and sisters in Christ as we shared a host of new holiday traditions and foods. The experience ended up being a great time of connection with others who were also far from home.

And ultimately, our family learned about genuine gratitude, and real thanksgiving, in new and fresh ways. We were thankful for blessings that we had previously overlooked. We shared in ways we had not considered before. And God blessed us even more richly, in ways that we might not have seen before. As a result, we have fond memories of Michigan Thanksgivings. They were special in a lot of ways—again this year, I say, “Thank you, God!”