

## **THANKSLIVING: THANKSGIVING MEMORIES FROM MICHIGAN**

**By Bob Young**

When our family was still four in number instead of the eventual five, we moved to Michigan. Our older son was 3-years-old, our younger son was 3-months-old. We were 1000 miles away from our family and the Thanksgiving celebrations and memories we had previously enjoyed. Although we felt a little lonely the first Thanksgiving, new friends and new experiences helped to fill the gap. It snowed 20 inches on the first Thanksgiving weekend we spent in Michigan, and any feelings of self-pity were quickly buried as we dealt with mountains of snow and found joy in helping others. (I had seen 20 inches of snow before, when I was growing up in Kansas, but usually it was really 5-6 inches of snow in drifts of 20 inches or more.) The second Thanksgiving, my mom and stepdad came to visit and the holiday was delightful. Any feelings of loneliness were temporarily put on hold.

By the time our third Thanksgiving in Michigan approached, reality had set in. (With the birth of our third son, we were dad, mom, and three sons.) After two years in the western suburbs of Detroit, 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 be able to spend the holidays with our extended family. We decided that we should establish our own family traditions. For us, this was beginning of a tradition of thanksgiving – perhaps reflecting in some small way the attitude of the Pilgrims 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 extended family was not totally inaccessible—only 20 hours away by car! We did not have to worry about building a shelter to protect us from the coming winter weather (which, in Michigan, had already set in on some Thanksgivings!). 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.

We decided to use the Thanksgiving season to spend time with others. Even though we were a long way from our physical family, we had become part of a wonderful, loving spiritual family. We in our little family—mom, dad, and three sons—could connect with other people. Across the years, we have connected with many friends and brothers and sisters in Christ as we shared new holiday traditions and foods. Our Michigan experience ended up being a time to connect and share life with others who were also far from home and away from their families.

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