

## **SQUANTO**

### **(A man whom God used to save the Pilgrims)**

Squanto was a Patuxet Indian. This was a large hostile tribe that tried to kill every white man with whom they came in contact. Squanto had been taken captive with four others in 1605 by Captain George Weymouth. He spent the next nine years in England but was returned to his home land in 1614 by Capt. John Smith.

Shortly thereafter, Squanto was again captured by a Capt. Thomas Hunt and sold back into slavery. This time he was rescued by local friars who introduced him to the Christian faith. Squanto, however, was much too enterprising to stay in a monastery and attached himself to an Englishman bound for London.

In 1619 he returned to America with Capt. Dermer. When Squanto stepped ashore, six months before the Pilgrims arrived, he received the most tragic blow of his life. A terrible plague had taken the life of every man, woman, and child in his entire tribe. Nothing remained but skeletons and ruined buildings. Squanto wandered aimlessly through the land where he had grown up as a child, where he had learned to hunt, and where he dreamed of raising a family.

The plague was so devastating that other tribes shunned the area fearing that it was cursed by evil spirits. By the providence of God, this was the very place where the Pilgrims landed. The Indians fear helps explain why the pilgrims were not immediately attacked and destroyed.

When Squanto heard that there were peaceful white people living in his old homeland, he felt he had found a reason for living. The English were like little babes, but he could show them how to survive in the hostile wilderness.

First, he taught them how to catch eels that were plentiful, fat, and sweet. He also taught them to stalk deer, hunt and fish. Of critical importance to their survival was the ability to raise corn. Squanto taught them how to plant the corn and fertilize the fields with fish. He taught them to protect the fields from the wolves for two weeks until the fish decomposed. He also taught them to plant pumpkins in the midst of the corn. That first year they harvested a flourishing crop from a full twenty acres of lucius corn.

Equally important for their survival was the ability to harvest and sell beaver pelts. The corn sustained them physically, and the sale of beaver pelts sustained them economically. Squanto was said to have helped them in a thousand different ways. He showed them how to refine maple syrup, to make medicines of herbs, and which berries were the most healthy to eat.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of April the Mayflower set sail for the return trip to England. 47 pilgrims and half of the crew had perished during the long hard winter. The summer of 1621 was beautiful and productive. With Squanto as a guide and interpreter, friendly contacts were made with neighbouring tribes. In October, Governor Bradford declared a day of Thanksgiving. Massasoit, a neighbouring chief, came and brought 90 Indians with him. The pilgrims initially feared that feeding such a large number would deplete their entire store of food for the coming winter. They did not need to worry, however, for the Indians did not arrive empty handed. They provided five dressed deer and more than a dozen wild turkeys. The Indian women showed the pilgrims how to make many tasty dishes, like hoe cakes and pudding made out of corn meal and maple syrup. They even showed them how to roast corn kernels in an earthen pot until they popped and became fluffy and white. It was the pilgrims first exposure to "popcorn."

The pilgrims in turn provided many vegetables, such as carrots, onions, turnips, parsnips, cucumbers, radishes, beets and cabbage. They also introduced the Indians to blueberry, apple, and cherry pie. There were friendly contests in shooting, wrestling, and running. The occasion was so happy that the Indians, who had come a day early, decided to stay for three extra days.

The pilgrims were right to give thanks to God. He had not only directed them to the precise area where they would be safe from hostile Indians, he had even provided them with Squanto, an English speaking guide and protector who had been trained in the Christian faith.

(Adapted from *The Light and the Glory*, by Peter Marshall and David Manuel)