

Coming to America on the *Mayflower*



In the early 1600s a group of English men and women called Separatists were living in Holland. They had moved there because in England they did not have religious freedom and were forced to belong to the Church of England. They did not believe in the Church of England, so they decided to separate from that church and go to Holland where they could worship God as they chose. But after living in Holland for a while these people began to think that their children were losing their family traditions and becoming too much like the Dutch. They decided that they needed to move again. This time they would go somewhere where they could raise their children as they chose and no one could tell them what religion they had to follow. They chose to sail to the New World—America.

These people, who we now call Pilgrims, hired two ships to take them to America. The two ships were the *Mayflower* and the *Speedwell*.

The Pilgrims made an agreement with the Virginia Company to build a settlement in Virginia and begin a new life in America. After loading the two ships with food, water, and other supplies the Pilgrims set sail for America in August 1620. Almost immediately the *Speedwell* began leaking. The Pilgrims had to turn around and sail back to England to fix the ship. Over two weeks passed before the *Speedwell* was ready. On August 21, 1620, the Pilgrims set off again for America. But soon water was again leaking into the *Speedwell*. After sailing nearly 300 miles toward America they had to turn back again. This time the Pilgrims decided to leave the *Speedwell* in England and sail to America with just one ship, the *Mayflower*.

Of course, putting all of the supplies and all of the people from two ships onto one ship made the *Mayflower* very crowded. There were now about 130 people on the small ship, 102 of them Pilgrims. On September 6, 1620, the *Mayflower* set sail once again for America. Unfortunately, because of the delay, the *Mayflower* was going to cross the Atlantic Ocean during the dangerous stormy season.

The first few weeks of the voyage went fairly well. The only real problem was seasickness among many of the Pilgrims. It was cold, wet, and very uncomfortable aboard the ship.

Then violent storms began pounding on the little ship. One man was washed overboard during a storm and was only saved by grabbing a rope and being pulled back onboard. The *Mayflower* began to take on water and a wooden beam cracked. The ship's crew quickly began to plug the cracks in the *Mayflower* and repair the broken beam. The storms pushed the ship farther and farther north. When the storms finally ended the Pilgrims and the crew of the *Mayflower* found themselves hundreds of miles north of where they were supposed to be. But there was some good news as well. A baby was born to Elizabeth Hopkins during the voyage. She named him Oceanus. On November 11, 1620, the *Mayflower* stopped at Cape Cod. It had been sixty-six days since they left England.

The Pilgrims decided to build their settlement near Cape Cod in a place they named Plymouth. The *Mayflower* stayed in Plymouth through the winter as the Pilgrims built their houses, and the ship finally returned to England on April 5, 1621