

THE MAYFLOWER PILGRIMS & the Founding of America

Part II – YA edition

Margot Morrell

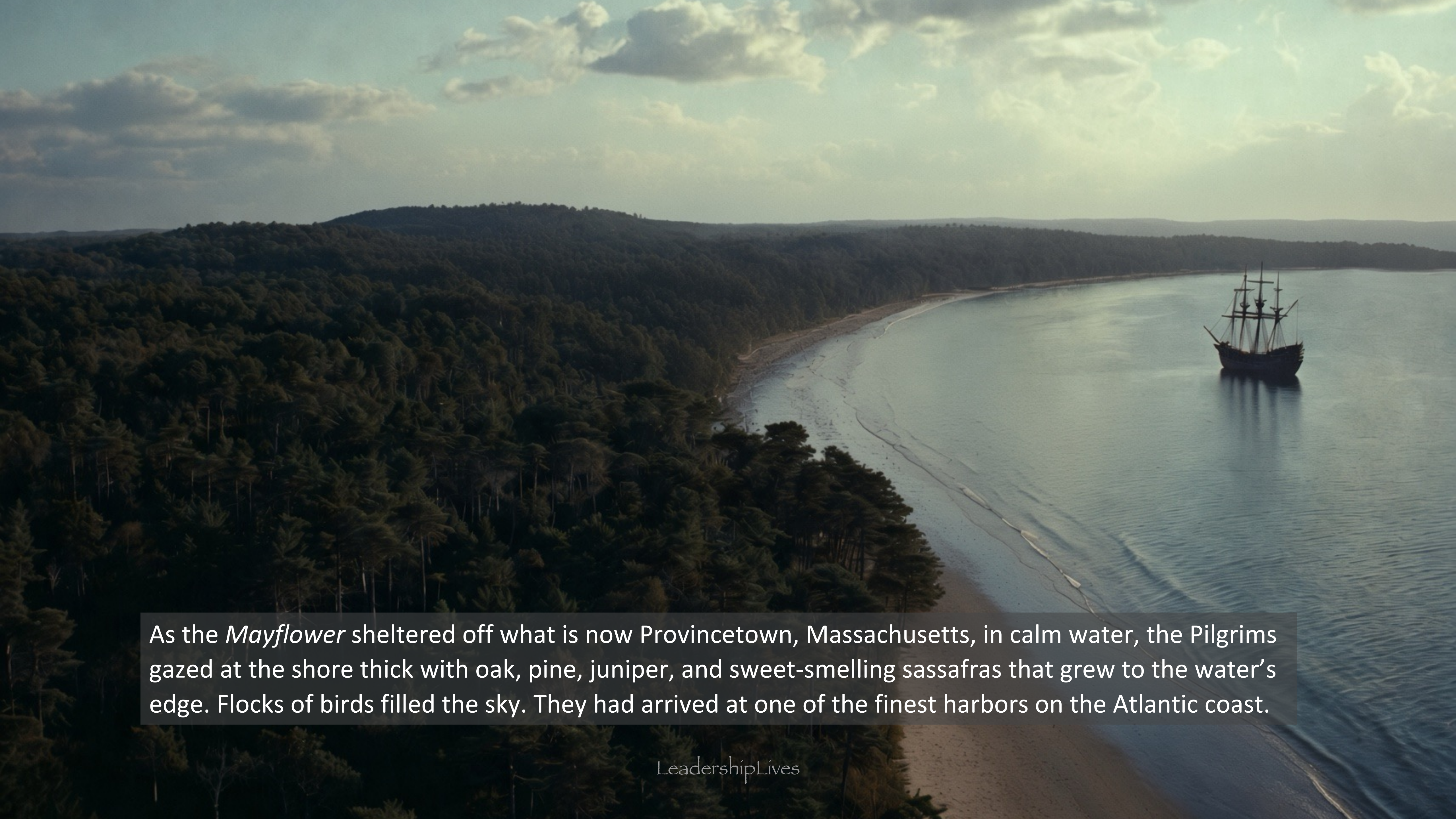
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"The foundation of New England was "not laid upon schism,
division or separation, but upon love, peace and holiness."

Edward Winslow, *Mayflower Pilgrim*

A dramatic scene from the movie "The Pilgrims of Mayflower" showing the ship's deck at sunset. Pilgrims are kneeling and standing, looking up at the sky with expressions of awe and gratitude. The ship's masts and rigging are visible against the golden light of the setting sun over the ocean.

In late November 1620, after two grueling months at sea, the *Mayflower* reached Cape Cod. The Pilgrims fell to their knees and thanked God for bringing them safely across the “vast and furious ocean.” They had crossed the Atlantic during peak hurricane season. Many had wondered if they would ever see land again.

An aerial photograph of Provincetown harbor, Massachusetts. The harbor is a calm body of water, reflecting the sky. A large, dark, three-masted sailing ship, the Mayflower, is anchored in the water. The shoreline is lined with a dense forest of trees, including oak, pine, juniper, and sassafras. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and historical.

As the *Mayflower* sheltered off what is now Provincetown, Massachusetts, in calm water, the Pilgrims gazed at the shore thick with oak, pine, juniper, and sweet-smelling sassafras that grew to the water's edge. Flocks of birds filled the sky. They had arrived at one of the finest harbors on the Atlantic coast.



The voyage had taken a brutal toll. Over the next three months, nearly half would die — mostly from the lack of fresh food during the voyage. By the time, the *Mayflower* reached Cape Cod, they were out of fresh water and firewood. But before anyone could leave the ship, they had to resolve a crucially important matter.



Forced north by storms, they were not in the area controlled by the London Company. Their contract was no longer valid. Amid “discontented and mutinous speeches,” fear was growing that some were “not well affected to unity and concord.” Before anyone set foot on land, they had to agree on how they would govern themselves.



They drafted a brief agreement called the Mayflower Compact. Signers pledged to “combine ourselves together into a civil body politic” and to create “just and equal laws” for the good of the entire colony. Everyone who signed agreed to obey those laws. It was the first step toward self-government in what would become America.



19th-century author Francis Baylies, a native of the area, described the scene: "On the bleak shore of a barren wilderness, in the midst of desolation, with the blasts of winter howling around them, ... the pilgrims of Leyden laid the foundation of American liberty."

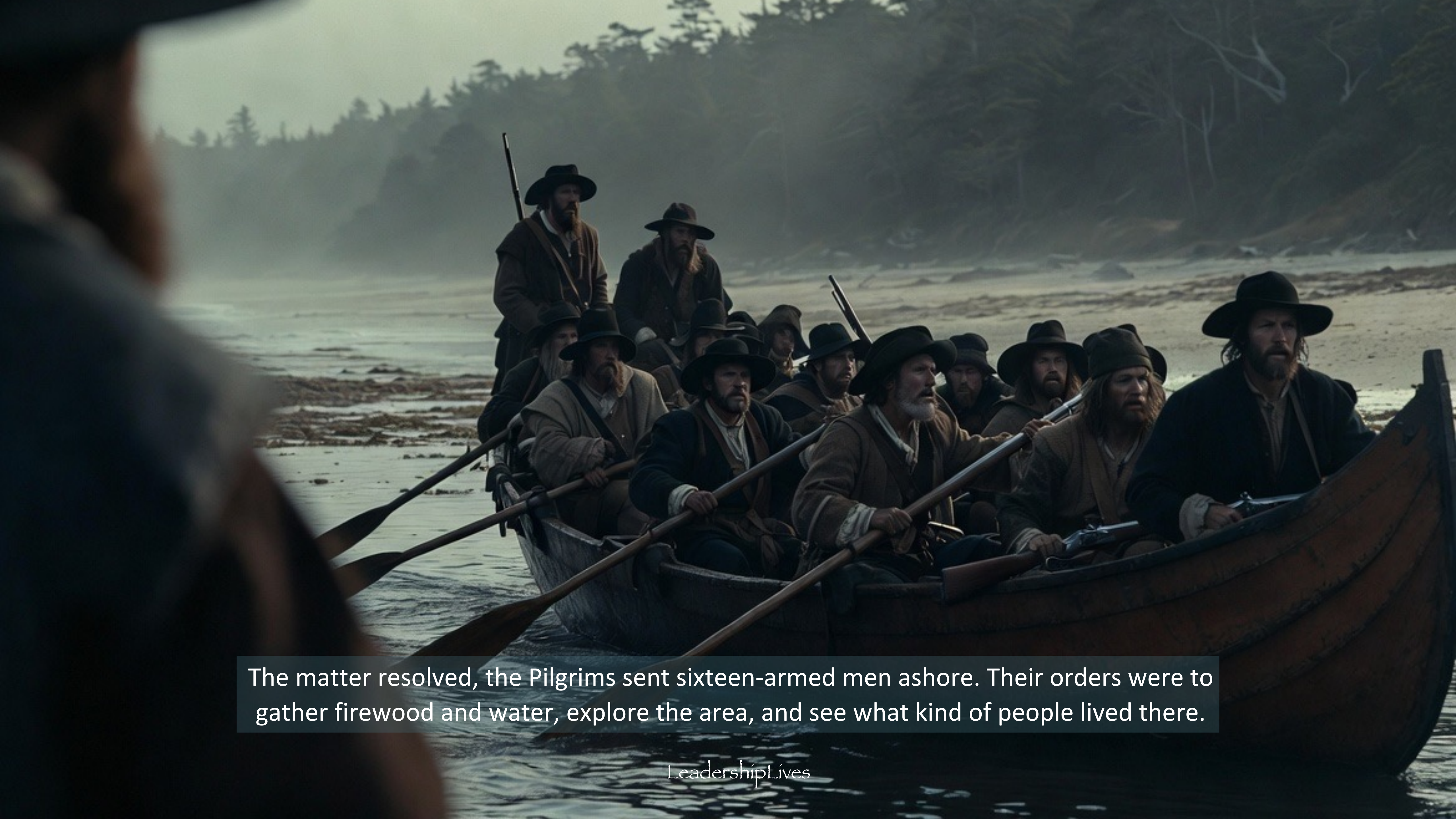


Edward Winslow ca. 1651

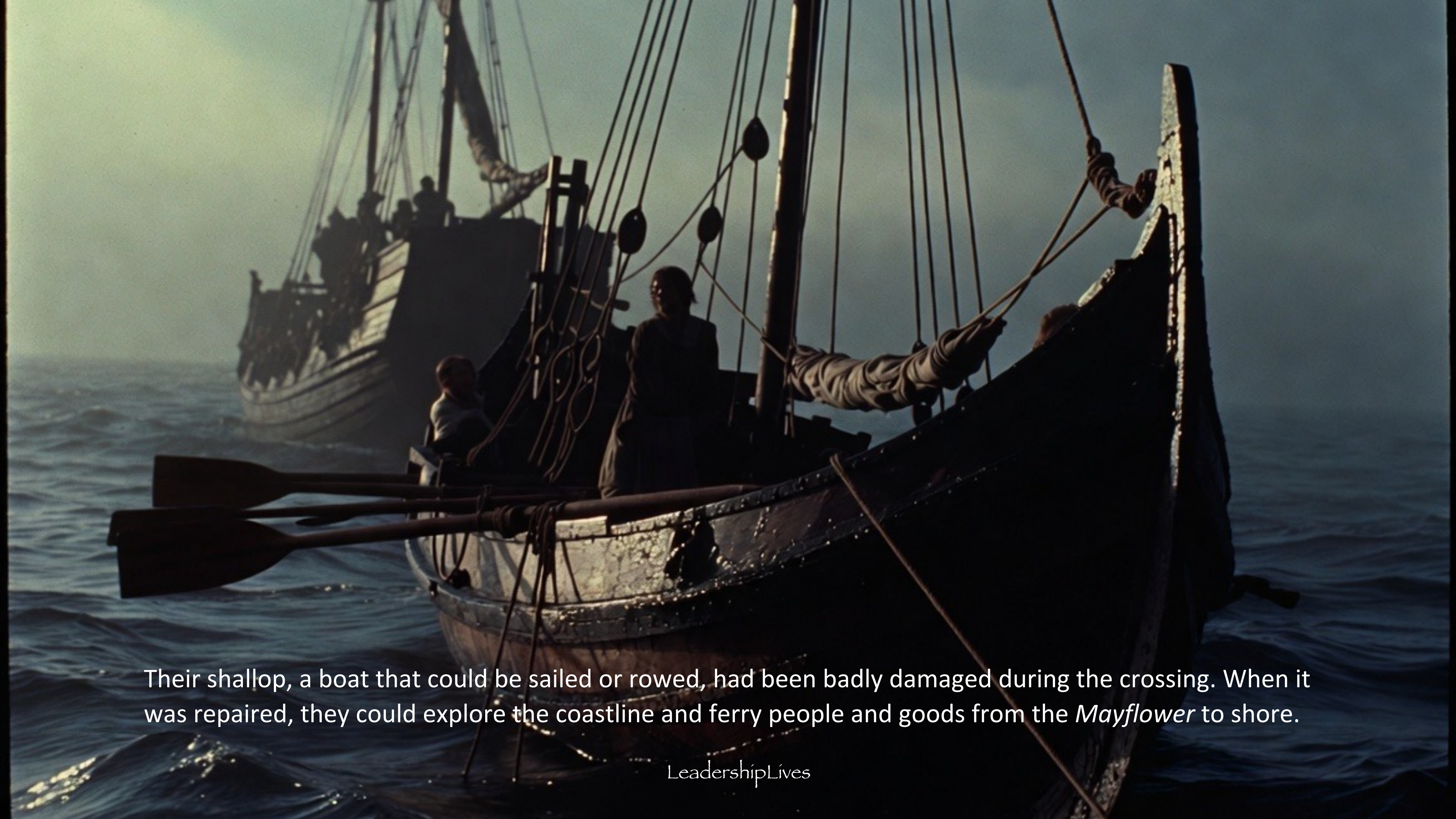


Edward Winslow ca. 2026

Edward Winslow was the third person to sign the Mayflower Compact. He is the only *Mayflower* passenger whose portrait exists today. In 1651, on a business trip to London, Winslow (then in his fifties) had his portrait painted. The modern image is based on the original portrait and provides an idea of what Winslow might look like if he were alive today.



The matter resolved, the Pilgrims sent sixteen-armed men ashore. Their orders were to gather firewood and water, explore the area, and see what kind of people lived there.



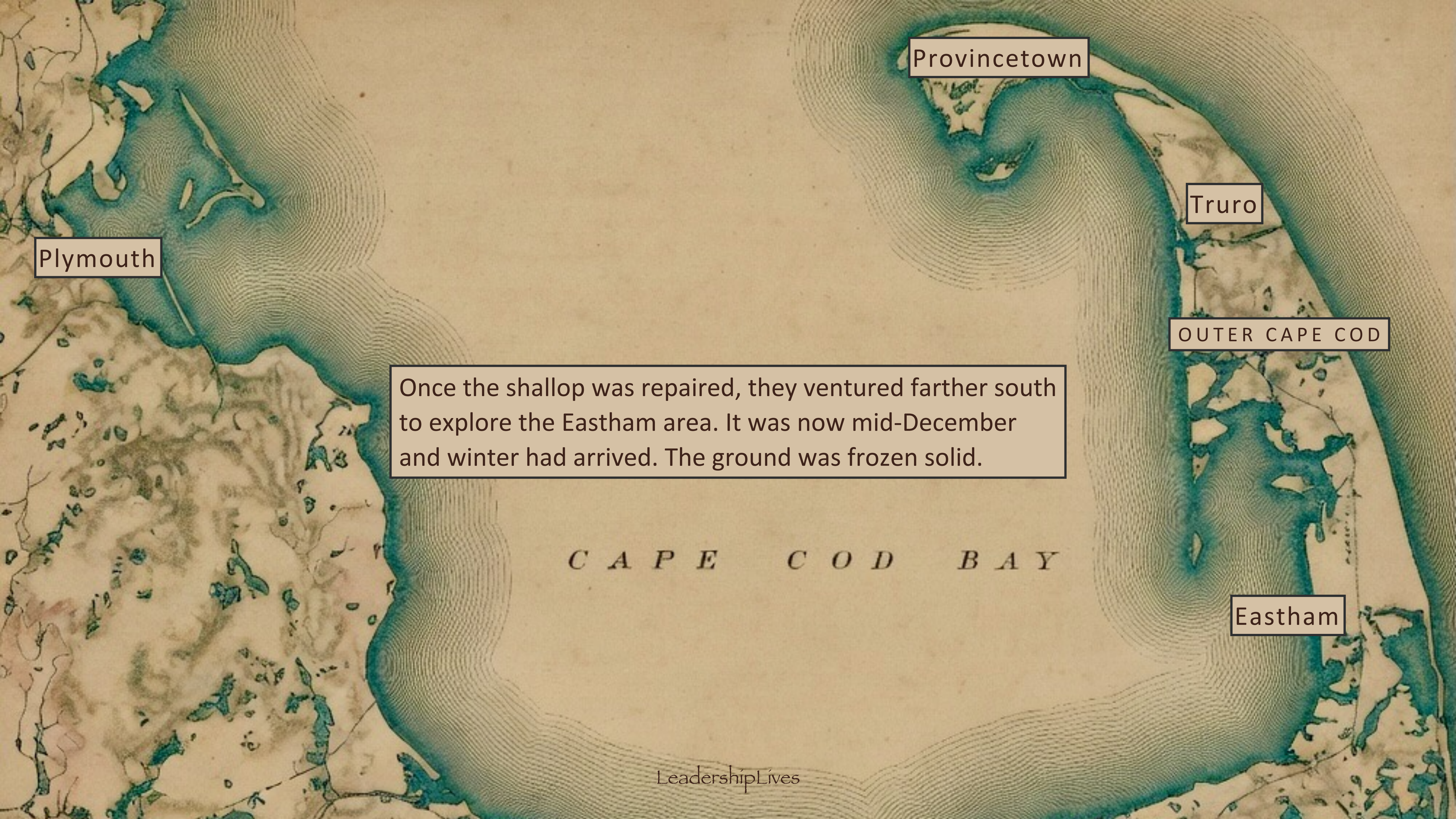
Their shallop, a boat that could be sailed or rowed, had been badly damaged during the crossing. When it was repaired, they could explore the coastline and ferry people and goods from the *Mayflower* to shore.



Till then, they used their smaller longboat to search for a site with a year-round source of fresh water and fertile farmland. They found abandoned campsites and occasionally caught sight of local people who refused to make contact. By early December, they had concluded the sandy soil of the outer cape was not suitable for farming.



They discovered bushels of corn buried by the Nauset tribe for the winter. They took the corn, pledging they would repay the owners. Six months later, they kept that promise to everyone's satisfaction. William Bradford called it “a special providence of God,” because without that seed corn, the colony might have starved.



Provincetown

Truro

Plymouth

OUTER CAPE COD

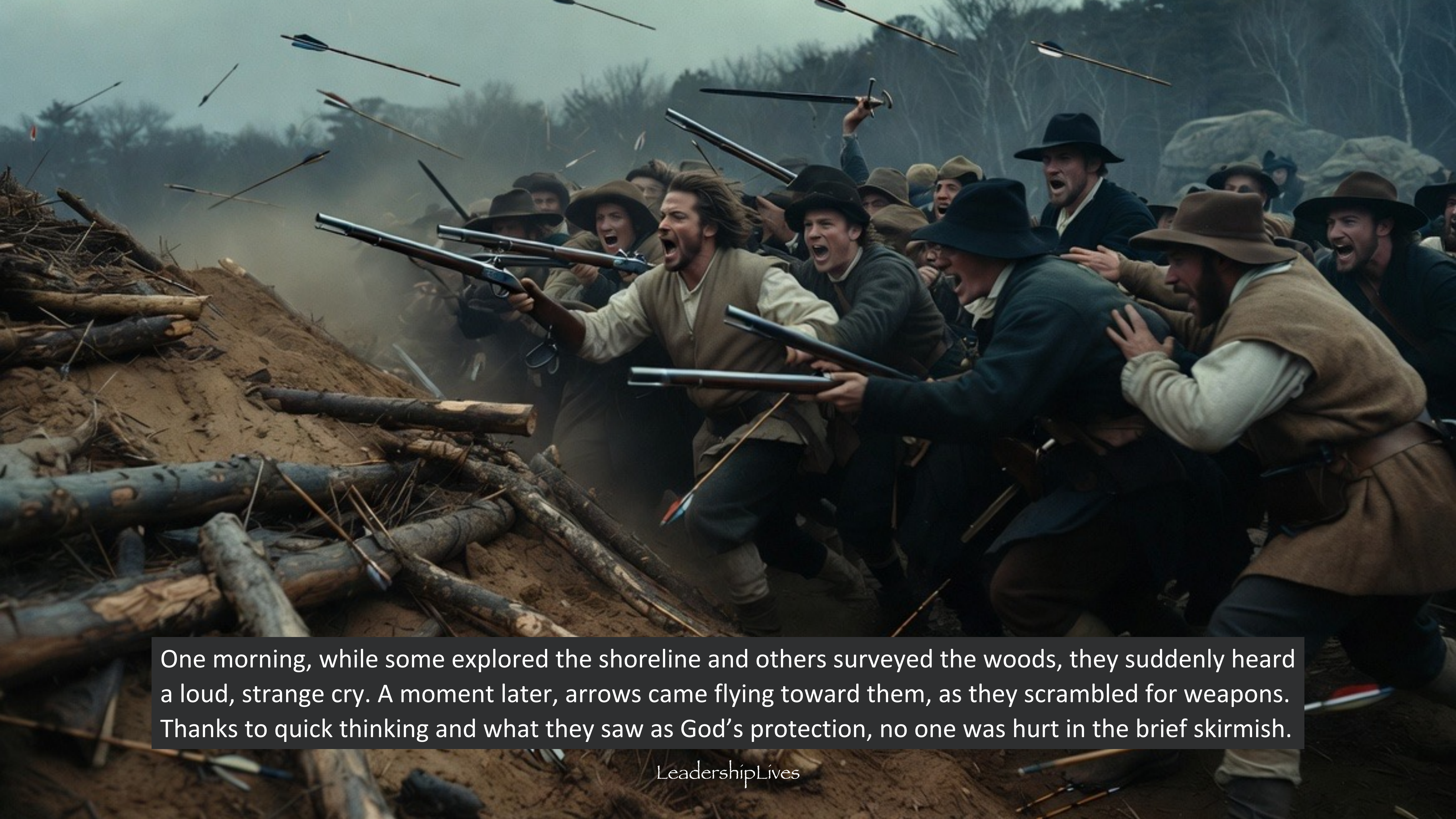
Once the shallop was repaired, they ventured farther south to explore the Eastham area. It was now mid-December and winter had arrived. The ground was frozen solid.

CAPE COD BAY

Eastham



At night, they built barricades of logs, stakes, and thick pine branches to protect themselves from the cold wind and attacks. They kept a fire burning in the center and slept in a circle around it.



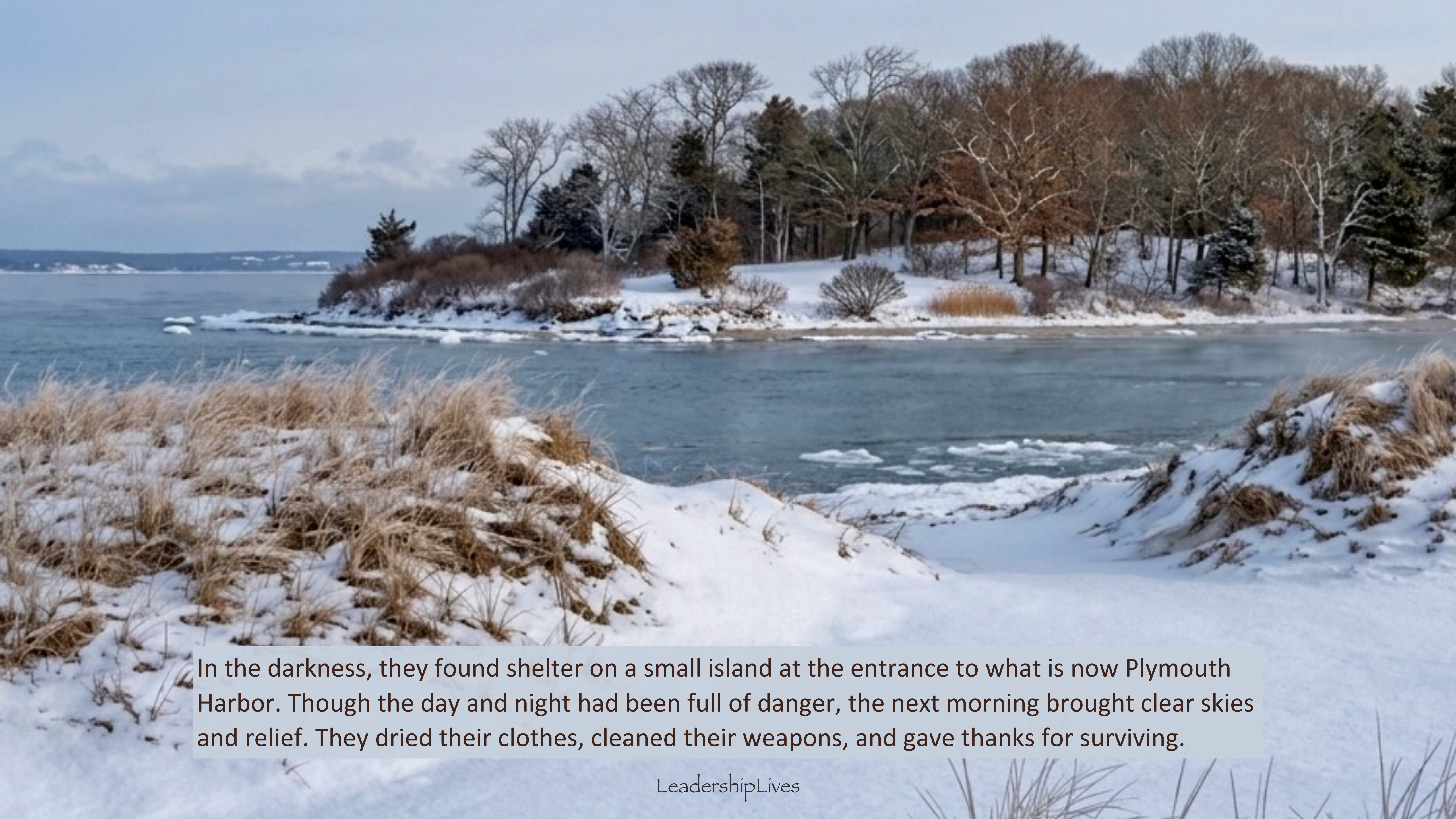
One morning, while some explored the shoreline and others surveyed the woods, they suddenly heard a loud, strange cry. A moment later, arrows came flying toward them, as they scrambled for weapons. Thanks to quick thinking and what they saw as God's protection, no one was hurt in the brief skirmish.



The *Mayflower's* pilot, Robert Coppin, had visited the area on an earlier voyage and urged them to explore a harbor on the other side of the bay. They set off on the thirty-seven-mile journey.



Halfway across the bay, they were slammed by a winter storm that shattered their mast, destroyed their sail and broke their rudder. They saved themselves, and the boat, by rowing.



In the darkness, they found shelter on a small island at the entrance to what is now Plymouth Harbor. Though the day and night had been full of danger, the next morning brought clear skies and relief. They dried their clothes, cleaned their weapons, and gave thanks for surviving.



They spent two nights on the island recovering and observing the Sabbath. On December 21, a month after arriving at the Cape, they tested the depth of the harbor and found it deep enough for large ships.



Surveying the land, they found fields that had once been planted with corn, several small streams, and what looked like a good spot to build. After weeks of searching, it was the most promising place they had found. They returned to the *Mayflower* with the news, and everyone felt a little more hopeful.



With the *Mayflower* anchored safely in the harbor, the healthier men began building a fort, a common storehouse, and simple homes. The women, children, and men who were too sick to work remained onboard.



During the winter months, fifty people died, sometimes at the rate of two or three a day. At their lowest point, only six or seven people were healthy enough to care for everyone else. They toiled day and night — fetching wood, cooking, washing clothes, and tending the sick and dying — without complaint. Among them were William Brewster and Captain Myles Standish, who earned the lasting gratitude of the entire colony.



In early spring, a Wampanoag man named Samoset walked boldly into the new settlement calling out, "Welcome, Englishmen!" He spoke some English and spent the night at the home of Stephen Hopkins.



He showed them how to plant corn using fish as fertilizer and the best way to catch fish in the local streams.



Most importantly, Samoset introduced them to Massasoit, the powerful chief of the Wampanoag, and to Squanto, who spoke English fluently.



With Squanto's help, Governor John Carver and Massasoit negotiated and signed a peace treaty on April 1, 1621. Their agreement lasted for over fifty years. Carver dropped dead of sunstroke while working in the field later that month.



On April 15, 1621, the Mayflower sailed for England with half its original crew. A few shipmates remained behind to work with the Pilgrims. More had perished during the harsh winter. The ship reached London six weeks later.



After the autumn harvest, the Pilgrims held a three-day feast. They invited Massasoit and about ninety Wampanoag guests to join them to celebrate America's first Thanksgiving.



Plimoth Plantation, 1622

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In 1889, the National Monument to the Forefathers was dedicated in Plymouth.

The giant statue shows a figure named Faith pointing toward heaven while holding a Bible.

She stands on a base supported by the principles the Pilgrims valued most: Morality, Law, Education, and Freedom.



By 1630, “about twenty thousand souls
had arrived in Massachusetts.”

Thomas Hutchinson

"It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religions, but on the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Patrick Henry

“The constitutional freedom of religion
[is] the most inalienable and sacred of all human rights.”

Thomas Jefferson

In 1825, William Bradford's descendants installed a monument to mark his grave in Plymouth. Their inscription reads,

Quia patres difficillime adepti sunt
nolite turpiter relinquere

“What our fathers with difficulty achieved, do not basely relinquish.”

The End

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