

# America's Divine Origins

## Mysteries at Valley Forge

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# Caption

*"The Prayer at Valley Forge," engraving by John McCrae, based on the painting by Henry Brueckner, ca. 1889. Isaac Potts, a Quaker, and source of the story of Washington praying at Valley Forge, is shown behind a nearby tree.  
(Library of Congress)*

# The Death of George Washington

When George Washington died in 1799, partisan infighting and international crises threatened the survival of the American experiment. Many Americans believed in Washington's unique ability to unite the country, and his death exacerbated national uncertainties

# Mason Locke Weems

As national yearning for Washington increased after his passing, Weems authored *The Life of George Washington*

How do we know about the prayer of  
George Washington?

Isaac Potts, as “Friend Potts”, from the Society of Friends, or Quakers. According to Weems, Potts passed through the woods and spied “the commander in chief of the American armies on his knees at prayer.” He observed Washington until the general concluded his devotions, at which point Potts returned home to report the encounter to his wife. He reminded her of his Quaker vow to pacifism, declaring, “I always thought that the sword and the gospel were utterly inconsistent. But George Washington has this day convinced me of my mistake.”



## About Quakers

The role Quakers played in the struggle for independence. Bound by pacifist doctrine, cultural and economic connections to the Crown, or a combination of these and other factors, many Quaker families remained neutral in the conflict. The “if-you’re-not-with-us-you-must-be-against-us” mentality meant the revolutionaries harbored little sympathy for neutrals and dissenters.

About George Washington's Faith  
Anglican Latitudinarian

In 1792 he wrote,

Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind those which are caused by a difference of sentiment in Religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing and ought most to be deprecated. I was in hopes that the enlightened & liberal policy which has marked the present age would at least have reconciled Christians of every denomination so far that we should never again see their religious disputes carried to such a pitch as to endanger the peace of Society.