

# *To the Heart of Valentine's Day*

Every February 14 we see an “angelic” infant with a bow and arrow aiming for the heart of his “valentine.” Cupids are everywhere with bows and arrows, heart shapes, paper lace, birds and flowers. All these are associated with St. Valentine’s Day. But just where did these symbols and the celebration of the 14th of February come from? Most of all, should we be celebrating this seemingly innocent day on which so many remember sweethearts and lovers?

## **A Priest with a Heart**

The origin of this day is not clear, as there seems to be more than one explanation. The most accepted legend is that a Roman priest named Valentine had a special feeling for young people. When the Roman Empire needed soldiers, Emperor Claudius II decreed that no one could marry or become engaged. Claudius believed that marriage made men want to stay home instead of fighting wars. The kindly Valentine defied the Emperor’s decree and secretly performed weddings for a number of young couples. He was arrested, imprisoned, and put to death.

Another legend holds that Valentine was aiding persecuted Christians and was imprisoned. A jailer and his family were so impressed by his sincerity that they became Christians themselves. Valentine was fond of the jailer’s blind daughter and by a miracle restored her sight. On the morning of his execution he sent her a farewell message signed “From your Valentine.” St. Valentine was beheaded on February 14. When he was buried, the story goes, a pink almond tree near his grave burst into bloom as a symbol of lasting love.

## **February 14 Fertility Festival**

February 14, when Valentine is supposed to have died, was also the eve of an important Roman festival, the *Lupercalia*. On this evening, Roman youths drew names of girls who would be their partners during this spring ceremony (February came later than it does today). To the Romans, *Lupercalia* was serious business.

Mark Antony was master of the *Luperci* College of Priests. He chose the *Lupercalia* festival in the year 44 B.C.E. as the proper time for offering the crown to Julius Caesar.

On February 15 the *Luperci* priests gathered at the cave of *Lupercal*, where according to legend, *Romulus* and *Remus* were nursed by a mother wolf. (*Lupus* is the Latin for wolf.) Following a sacrifice, two youths of noble birth were brought forward. After a ceremony, they ran through the Roman streets, lashing about with goatskin thongs. The streets would be crowded with young women, because a lash of the sacred thongs was believed to increase their fertility. The goatskin thongs were *februa*, the lashing of the *februatio*, both stemming from a Latin word meaning to purify. From it comes the name for the month of February.

Long after Rome had become a walled city and the seat of a powerful empire, the *Lupercalia* lived on. When Roman armies invaded what are now France and Britain, in the first century B.C.E., they took with them many pagan customs. Included were those of the *Lupercalia*.

By the fourth century Christianity became the dominant religion in Rome, and the *Lupercalia* was declared unlawful. Throughout the empire the church endeavored to stamp out pagan practices brought in by the heathen. “Unable to abolish some of the pagan festivals that the people loved, they accepted these and gave them Christian names” (from *The Story of Valentine Symbols*, by Edna Barth). Barth goes on to say, “So it was *Lupercalia* which survived late into the 5th century. St. Valentine’s name was given to a festival that had celebrated springtime and fertility in human beings and other animals, and do what the church might, the ancient meaning never quite left it. Memories of the *Lupercalia* as a celebration of mating were handed down,

attaching themselves to the saint's name.”

It was the eve of the ancient feast of the Lupercalia when the Romans habitually preserved the memory of an ancient rural deity, *Faunus*. It is not difficult to imagine that the public beheading of Valentine the Christian was a pagan's victory — the priest who upheld the Bible beheaded at this heathen celebration! Frank Staff writes in his book, *The Valentine and Its Origins*, “In later years when the early Christian fathers were busy obliterating pagan superstitions and dates by substituting those of the Christian belief, names of many of the martyred Saints were used to replace the old festivals. In this way St. Valentine having suffered on the eve of the *Lupercalia*, the 14th of February, was now to perpetuate forever the memory of this festival of the return of spring when a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love and when the birds begin mating, Centuries later it was usual on St. Valentine's day for young men to draw by lots the names of young women, a custom that lingered in some of the more remote villages of the British Isles right up to Victorian times. Some accounts written during the Victorian era of St. Valentin's day maintain that putting the names of young women into a box to be drawn by the men was part of the ceremony of the Lupercalia, and has been repeated so often as to be believed true. But it has been authoritatively stated that this has yet to be proven.”

Not all writers agree with author Staff, but see a direct connection between drawing names for Valentine's Day and the *Lupercalia*. There is strong evidence that the custom of sending valentines and other festivities on February 14 has erotic origins and it likely was a licentious festival involving peculiar fertility rites and especially involving young people. The little cherub called Cupid from the Latin *cupido* or “desire” is actually the Greek deity of love known as *Eros*. Alexandrian poets made him popular in Rome (*Funk and Wagnalls Encyclopedia*, p. 2542).

Most European countries, with the exception of Germany and Britain, have little to do with St. Valentine's Day. The customs in the United States go back to the early settlers who brought this rite from Europe.

### **Bottom line: the dollar sign**

St. Valentine's Day is perpetuated by manufacturers of greeting cards and the retail merchants who see the opportunity to induce customers to buy special gifts for their valentines. Through slick advertising the public is made to feel guilty in neglecting to give just the right gift to their valentine. The implication is that if they don't give a gift, they don't really care, for this is the day to show our love for others.

One big problem with getting involved in worldly holidays and special days, more often than not, is that man lets these days stemming from pagan practices overshadow and replace the days Yahweh has given us for our own good. Satan, the deity of this world, has many more promoters of his pagan days than Yahweh has for his Sabbath and Feast days.

The merchants who seem to live from one holiday to another are all trying to make a buck — even for St Valentine's Day. They include greeting card makers, florists, cosmetic manufacturers, candy and toy makers, bakeries, and clothiers. Notice the subtle influences we are subject to when we go shopping. Signs, displays, leaflets, newspapers, magazines and TV all call attention to their goods saying, “When you care enough to give the very best.”

It is up to us as believers in the Bible not to place anything before Yahweh and His way of life. We should not wait for a special day of pagan origins to show our love to our fellow man, but to exhibit fraternal concern and love every day in every way we can. The Adversary hopes that worldly holidays will totally overshadow the really important times commanded now and which will be observed for all time in Yahweh's kingdom. See our booklet called, *Biblical Holy Days*.

It is amazing how much our world is steeped in heathen “truth-transplanting” tradition. The days of *Lupercalia* are with us even in subtle ways. Consider one writer's observation: “Today

we still refer to one who fancies himself with the ladies as something of a ‘wolf’ and when a pretty girl walks down the street young men give a “wolf’s whistle” which shows that the spirit of *Lupercalia* is still with us.

Yahweh’s true Spirit is here, as well, and available to those who live honest and pure lives for Him through His righteous Son. A position of rulership in His Kingdom awaits those who do.

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