

# *Valentine's Day*

How can I say "I love you"?.... let me count the ways!

On their wedding anniversary, a husband might give his wife a nice card and a gift, perhaps some flowers and maybe even a romantic dinner at a nice restaurant. He's saying "I love you"! He's reminding his wife that he loves her.

But our society, urged on by the greetings card industry and other merchants, tries to tell us that it isn't enough for family members to declare their love for each other on anniversaries, and on Mothers' and Fathers' Days. We must, they tell us, do it all over again.... on Saint Valentines' Day!

But God's people answer "No!" The members of God's church do not observe Saint Valentines' Day.

Why not?

The purpose of this article is to explain to you the reasons why we in God's church do not observe Saint Valentine's Day. I'd like to do this by, with a little tongue-in-cheek humour, asking and answering five questions. Let's go through them one by one.

My sources of information for this article were the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Funk & Wagnall's Encyclopaedia and, of course, God's Word in the Holy Bible.

## ***Question 1: Who was Saint Valentine?***

"Valentine" was apparently a very popular name amongst the so-called "saints" of yesteryear. There were a considerable number of them by that name! But the most famous *Valentines* were two men - both claimed by the Roman Catholic church to be martyrs - whose festivals both fall on February 14th! That's right, there were two Saint Valentines! Did you know that before? Neither did I!

These two men apparently had quite a lot in common. One was a Roman priest, and the other was the Bishop of Terni, a town in central Italy. They lived at the same time, around the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D. They are said to have both died on the same day and were both supposedly buried on the same street, the Via Flamminia. Don't ask me why they weren't buried in cemeteries like civilized saints!

Were these just coincidences, or were these two characters actually one and the same man? We don't know. The truth about them has disappeared in the fog of time.

Except for the setting of their feast day, there is absolutely no indication at all why either of these men are connected with love and romance. That is as it should be... as long as they were behaving themselves... as all priests and bishops of the Roman church are supposed to!

That, in a nutshell, is about all we know about the two Saint Valentines. Not much, is it?

### ***Question 2: What are the real origins of the celebration of this day?***

As far back as documented history goes, we can trace the celebration back to two ancient Roman fertility festivals: a lesser-known one on February 13th called the "Faunalia" in honour of the god Faunus and the better-known one on February 15th called the "Lupercalia" honouring the god Lupercus. With some similarity to the situation with the two Saint Valentines mentioned above, Faunus and Lupercus were considered to be closely related and are even thought by some historians to be one and the same god, named differently by ancient Italians living in different regions.

The main centre of the ancient Lupercalia celebrations was the cave of the Lupercal, on the Palatine Hill in Rome, where Romulus and Remus, the legendary founders of Rome, were supposedly nursed and brought up by a she-wolf. The Greek word for "wolf" is "lukos", and the Latin name for the grey wolf is "canis lupus." Hence Lupercal, Lupercus and Lupercalia. Some traditions even say that it was Romulus and Remus who actually instituted the feast of Lupercalia.

I don't have space here to go into the details of all of the strange rituals that were performed at the Lupercalia but I must mention a few. One ritual had two young priests running almost naked (this is in mid-February, remember!) around the old city walls, slapping any by-standers they met with thongs cut from animals that had been sacrificed earlier. A smack from one of these thongs was supposed to cure sterility. A purification ceremony was held during the Lupercalia at which Roman women were purified by the priests of Pan Lyceus. Please don't ask me the details of how this purification was accomplished!

***Question 3: How was the Lupercalia transformed into Saint Valentine's Day?***

The feast of Lupercalia was very important to the Romans, and the feast of Faunalia to other Italians. It is regarded as the oldest of the Roman festivals and, along with the Saturnalia (a precursor of Christmas), was among the most important.

The importance of this festival is borne out by the fact that the primary function of two of the most prominent families of the ancient Roman nobility (the Fabius and Quinctilius families) was to organize the activities for the annual Lupercalia festival. A modern parallel of this would be if our Canadian prime minister was to dedicate two of his top cabinet ministers and their complete staffs to the organization of the annual Saint Valentine's Day celebrations! Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But that's how important the Lupercalia was to the ancient Romans!

Lupercalia was firmly entrenched, even with the arrival in Rome of Christianity. The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that: "the annual celebration of the Lupercalia went on until A.D. 494, when it was changed by Pope Gelasius I into... the feast of the Purification."

Remember that one of the Lupercalia's major rituals was the purification of the Roman women by the priests of Pan Lyceus.

Here we have a pope substituting his interpretation of God's post-pregnancy purification ceremony (see Leviticus 12:2-6; Luke 2:22) as a direct replacement for a heathen one!

In the early days of the apostate churches, their feast of Purification was kept on February 14th... forty days inclusive from their Christ Mass (January 6th). It is still kept by the Armenian church on that date.

Later, most of these churches changed the dates of their winter festivals - apparently so that they would better coincide with their pagan counterparts. Christmas was changed from January 6th to coincide with the pagan Saturnalia on December 25th.

The feast of Purification was changed to February 2nd - forty days after this new Christmas Day. This new date was established as the feast of the Purification in 542 A.D. by Emperor Justinian and is today alternately called "Candlemas." This may or may not be significant - it seems too much of a co-incidence not to be - but February 2nd is a very prominent day in witchcraft practices around the world.

The feast of Epiphany - when the Magi were supposed to have arrived from eastern lands to worship the young Jesus - was added on January 6th. (Please see our article, "Who were the Magi?")

The gap between Christmas and Easter was bridged with the "christianization" of the Lupercalia through the dedication of February 14th to the two Saint Valentines (or should that be "Saints Valentine"?).

***Question 4: What does God think about it?***

There are literally hundreds of warnings in both the Old and New Testaments, cautioning God's people to stick to His ways, His laws and His feasts, and to stay away from the pagan ways of the world around. Let us take a look at just a few of these warnings:

**While Israel dwelt in Shittim the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel; (Numbers 25:1-3 RSV)**

**Take care not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, or it will become a snare among you. You shall tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles (for you shall worship no other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice. And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods. You shall not make cast idols. (Exodus 34:12-17 NRSV)**

Then, right away after this instruction, God commands His people to keep His Sabbaths and His feasts:

**You shall keep the festival of unleavened bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt... Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even in plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest. You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year. Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. (Exodus 34:18, 21-23 NRSV)**

Yes, the Bible is just full of warnings for God's children to stick to His ways, and to avoid pagan ways like we would avoid the plague. If you need further convincing, please look up God's repeated warnings in all of the scriptures containing the word "gods" (small "g"). There are hundreds of them! But there is probably no scripture in the whole Word of God that puts it in better words than Deuteronomy 12:29-32:

**When the LORD your God has cut off before you the nations whom you are about to enter to dispossess them, when you have dispossessed them and live in their land, take care that you are not snared into imitating them, after they have been destroyed before you: do not inquire concerning their gods, saying, "How did these nations worship their gods? I also want to do the same." You must not do the same for the LORD your God, because every abhorrent thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods. They would even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. You must diligently observe everything that I command you; do not add to it or take anything from it.**

## ***Question 5: What should we do about it?***

The scriptures, even the few that we have space to reproduce here, are quite clear that we in God's church should *not* be keeping Saint Valentines Day and other heathen celebrations. God makes His "alternatives" quite clear. We are to keep God's holy days, and we are to keep them with joy and zeal.

The ancient Israelites were given the authority and the responsibility to go into their new homeland and to tear down all of the places of pagan worship. We, of course, have not been given that authority and responsibility. We just have to make the best of living in the middle of all of this thinly disguised paganism. For most adults in God's church, Saint Valentine's Day celebrations does not present much of a problem. In the unlikely event that you're invited to a Valentines Day party, just say "No". So as not to get into a major discussion that is probably not necessary, be thinking in advance of good reasons (true ones, of course!) why you cannot go.

The ones who do have most problem with the avoidance of Valentines Day celebrations are our children, particularly the younger ones. High-school aged children should be able to do their own advance preparations the same as the adults do. Most of them have been through it often enough to know what to expect, and how to avoid it. But our younger children cannot be expected to handle it on their own. They need your help, parents!

Please do not rely on that chat you had last September with your little guy's new Grade Two teacher, in which you told her in two short minutes about the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles, Halloween, Christmas, New Year's, Valentines, April Fool's Day, Easter, the Days of Unleavened Bread, the Wave Sheaf Offering and Pentecost. Take some extra time shortly before Valentines Day to drop by the school to have another quiet talk with the teacher (or teachers if that's the case). If you definitely can't get to the school to see the teachers in person, write and send a friendly little note of explanation to each of them. Be nice! It isn't the teacher's fault that the school's curriculum is built around the world's celebrations and holidays. Remember, with thanksgiving, that they haven't been given to understand these things as we have, also that we too were "in the dark" not so very long ago.

We can be glad that we've been freed from the modern versions of the old pagan holidays. Let's turn our attention in this regard to more effectively preparing for and keeping God's true Sabbaths and holy days.

*John Plunkett*

*Building Bridges, The Church of God - Canada*

*Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada*