

GOD'S VALENTINE
by Sharon Montsion

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For the last month we have seen the business world's view of expressions of love in most of our malls, boutiques, gift shops and floral shops. We have been listening to the songs of love on the radio. TV has been coaxing the viewing audiences to watch their specials.

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Valentine's Day is a special day that has been set aside in order to honor "love". It is most famous for being a time of celebrating "romantic love".

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As the 14th approaches many of have been looking for that right card, ordered that perfect bouquet of flowers, or have made reservations for the candlelight dinner.

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"Be My Valentine". This is a phrase that says many different things to different people with the celebration of Valentine's Day. Cards with hearts and little poems on them. Chocolates, flowers, special planned times together, family time and various gifts gave to someone you love

Valentine's Day started in the time of the Roman Empire, In ancient Rome, Feb. 14th was a holiday to honor Juno, the Queen of gods and goddesses. The Romans also knew her as the goddess of women and marriage. The following day, Feb 15th, began the Feast of Lupercalia. The lives of young boys and girls were strictly separate. However, one of the customs of the young people was name drawing.

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(This is what the term "love lotteries" refers to)On the eve of the festival of Lupercalia, the names of Roman girls (maidens), were written on slips of paper and placed in jars. Each young man would draw a girl's name from the jar and would then be partners for the duration of the festival with the girl's name he chose. Sometimes the pairing of children lasted an entire year, and often, they would fall in love and would later marry.

Our Mothers and Fathers in the Christian Faith would be surprised at what has become of Valentine's Day.

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They would be especially shocked at the use of cupid since he was a character from pagan mythology, casting his spell of “love” on those he targeted.

In the United States, Miss Esther Howland is given credit for sending the first valentines similar to ours today. Commercial valentines were introduced in the 1800's . The town of Loveland, Colorado, had a large post office business around February 14th.

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The spirit of good continues as valentines are given out with cute sentimental verses as the children exchange valentines at school.

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For sure **On Tuesday**, almost everyone will receive at least one card sporting a red heart of some size that is filled with sweet tidings. In other words, a Valentine’s card, as they have become known since the beginning of the 18th century.

What we call Valentine’s Day was at one time the Feast of St. Valentine. It was a religious holiday. For Christians in the past, this holiday was a day to remember and celebrate the life and death of a Christian martyr, Valentine.

Who was Valentine?

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There are more facts and fables surrounding Valentine’s Day. One of the most fascinating is the true story of Saint Valentine himself.

He, that is Valentinus, is credited with helping Christians during the persecution by Claudius II, the Roman Emperor in the 3rd Century. Under his regime it was a crime to provide even aid or comfort to Christians. Claudius also had an edict that prohibited the marriage of young people. This was based on the hypothesis that unmarried soldiers fought better than married soldiers because married soldiers might be afraid of what might happen to their wives or families if they died.

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The idea of encouraging them to marry within the Christian church was what Valentinus was about. Many young couples went against the law and went to Valentine to perform their marriage ceremonies—secretly of course. One night, there were footsteps. The couple he was marrying escaped but Valentine was caught and thrown in prison.

While in prison, Valentine continued to minister. He witnessed to the guards. One of the guards, Asterius, was a good man who had adopted a blind girl. He asked Valentine if his God could help his daughter. Valentine prayed and the girl was given her sight. Our God healed her.

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Valentine told them just how much Jesus loved them. The guard and his whole family, 46 people, believed in Jesus Christ and were baptized. Her father allowed her to visit him in the cell. Sometimes they would talk for hours. She helped him keep his spirits up. In fact, many young people came to jail to visit him.

Many of the young couples he ministered to, threw flowers and notes up to his window, many of them addressed “to My Valentine”. They wanted him to know that they too believed in love and that they were grateful that he would risk his life for them.

After a year in jail, Valentinus was summoned to appear before Claudius II. The Emperor was impressed with the young priest’s dignity that Claudius attempted to convert him to worshiping Roman gods to save his from execution. *During the trial* they asked Valentine what he thought of the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury. Of course, Valentine said they were false gods and that the God that Jesus called Father was the only true God. Valentinus refused to renounce Christianity. Claudius became furious and the Romans threw him back into the dungeon, prison for insulting the gods. Claudius ordered that Valentinus be sentenced to a three part execution: beaten with clubs, a stoning, and finally to be beheaded.

His execution was carried out on February 14th, 269AD, outside the Flaminian gate to Rome. On the day he was to die, he left his young friend, the daughter, a little note thanking her for her friendship and loyalty. He signed it “From your Valentine”

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I believe these notes started the custom of exchanging love messages on Valentine’s day. Many years ago on February 14th, people took time to remember the martyr Valentine. They thought about love and friendship. They remembered the heartless, cruel, Claudius II. They remembered how he tried to stand in the way of love. As they remembered, they were joyful, and were encouraged because they knew that love couldn’t be beaten.

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On February 14th, they took time to remember that Valentine praised God in his prison cell .(Just as Paul and Silas praised God and sang hymns). They took time to remember how a wicked emperor had Valentine beheaded after he heard that Valentine was still making converts, even in prison.

St. Valentine knew that he might get caught in his Christian activities. He knew that if he told the court the truth about the Roman gods that he would be thrown in prison. And he knew that if he continued to witness to Christ in the prison he would make his captors angry. But he continued, because he loved the Lord and his fellow humans . He was willing to risk his life to free the prisoners and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who needed to hear it.

February 14th became “Remembrance Day” of their beloved Valentine.

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

John 15:13

God showed his love for us by Christ coming to die for our sins. And St. Valentine demonstrated this love when he “laid down his life for his friends” and for what he believed. This is the kind of love that Valentine’s Day is really about.

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God sent the greatest Valentine. John 3:16

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How much does God love you? Jesus answered this question as He stretched out his arms on the cross and said, “This much” and became our sacrificial Lamb. He died for the washing away of our sins. God’s love is unconditional and sacrificial, and it is ultimately expressed on the cross. God is love and He loves us!!

God is the source of true love. The very nature of God and all of His actions are loving. God loved us enough to die for us and St. Valentine loved God enough to die for God’s Truth.

What better way to celebrate Valentine's Day then to commit or recommit our lives to Christ.

“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

I John 4:9,10

I ask you how much do you love Jesus? Sometimes it is dangerous to stand up against injustice, hatred, and prejudice. Sometimes it is difficult to oppose the world's view of things to proclaim the truth of God's love. But that is what Valentine did and that is exactly what Jesus did for you and me.

Valentine willingly gave his life because he loved Christ more than his own life. **The Bible talks about dying to self for another. We should be willing to lay down our lives for those we love.** If you asked the question, “Do you love your sweetheart or your spouse, your children, your friend enough to die for him or her?,”

What would your response be? I'm sure if your love is deep and committed you would not hesitate in answering, “Yes!”. In a clear cut case of life and death many would die for the ones they love. But in our day to day lives, few are presented with opportunities with a life and death situation. On the other hand, every day we are presented with opportunities to die to self. ***In other words to sacrifice our wants for the wants of another.***

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Another beautiful chapter dealing with Christian love is I Corinthians , chapter 13. Here is a prime example of unselfish love”

*“4. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast, it is not proud.
5. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking , it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.
6. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
7. It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres.
8. Love never fails”*

I Corinthians 13: 4 - 8

The phrase, “Be My Valentine” is a phrase that we all want to hear. It simply means, “you are loved”. I am here to tell you that you are loved. God loves you and wants you to be His Valentine. The love that God gives us is not like the world’s love. The world’s love is tainted. The world’s love can fail us. The world’s love gives up on us. The world’s love is as sturdy as the paper that most Valentine cards are made of. **God’s love is not a flimsy cheap imitation.** His pure selfless love is the real thing. His love is an all giving love, that was willing to suffer and die for our deliverance.

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Will you be God’s Valentine? Say Yes and receive God’s love. And when you do, remember the HIS Valentine and the way He gave everything, laid down his life, to God His Father because he loved. St. Valentine loved his God with all heart, soul, and mind even unto death.

Perhaps your love for God has grown a little cold. Does the fire of your first love need to be rekindled? Do you long to spend time with your Jesus as you once did? You know, He waits for you. Go to Him and renew your love to the lover of your soul. God desires an intimate love relationship with each of us.

Yes, it has been said that the most beautiful words in any language are. “I love you”. **Take time with Jesus, just to tell Him you love Him, that He is the ONE you love.** Receive God’s perfect love and return to Him the love He deserves.

Pray.

Close with the following songs:

Dwelling Places

Arms of Love