

Valentines Day - a Pagan Celebration



The Romans celebrated a Pagan holiday on February 14th to honor Juno Fructifier, Queen of the Roman gods and goddesses as well as goddess of marriage. In one ritual, women would submit their names to a common box and men would each draw one out. These two would be a couple for the duration of the festival (and at times for the entire following year). Both rituals were designed to promote not only fertility, but also life generally.

February 15th & Feast of Lupercalia:

On February 15, Romans celebrated Lupercalia, honoring Faunus, god of fertility. Men would go to a grotto dedicated to Lupercal, the wolf god, located at the foot of Palatine Hill and where Romans believed that the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, were suckled by a she-wolf. The men would sacrifice a goat, don its skin, and run around, hitting women with small whips, an act which was supposed to ensure fertility.

St. Valentine, Christian Priest:

According to one story, Roman emperor Claudius II imposed a ban on marriages because too many young men were dodging the draft by getting married (only single men had to enter the army). A Christian priest named Valentinus was caught performing secret marriages and sentenced to death. While awaiting execution, young lovers visited him with notes about how much better love is than war — the first valentines. The execution occurred in 269 CE on February 14th.

Another Valentinus was a priest jailed for helping Christians. During his stay he fell in love with the jailer's daughter and sent her notes signed from your Valentine. He was eventually beheaded and buried on the Via Flaminia. Reportedly Pope Julius I built a basilica over his grave. A third and final Valentinus was the bishop of Terni and he was also martyred, with his relics being taken back to Terni.

Christianity Takes Over Valentines Day:

In 469, emperor Gelasius declared February 14th a holy day in honor of Valentinus instead of the pagan god Lupercus. This allowed Christianity to take over some of the celebrations of love and fertility which had perviously occurred in the context of paganism. Pagan celebrations were reworked to fit the martyr theme — Christianity did not approve of rituals that encouraged sexuality. Instead of pulling girls names from boxes, both boys and girls chose the names of martyred saints from a box.

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