

### The Story of Valentine's Day's Origin

"The story of Valentine's Day begins in the third century with an oppressive Roman emperor and a humble Christian Martyr. The emperor was Claudius II. The Christian was Valentinus.

Claudius had ordered all Romans to worship twelve gods, and had made it a crime punishable by death to associate with Christians. But Valentinus was dedicated to the ideals of Christ; not even the threat of death could keep him from practicing his beliefs. He was arrested and imprisoned.

During the last weeks of Valentinus's life a remarkable thing happened. Seeing that he was a man of learning, the jailer asked whether his daughter, Julia, might be brought to Valentinus for lessons. She had been blind since birth. Julia was a pretty young girl with a quick mind. Valentinus read stories of Rome's history to her. He described the world of nature to her. He taught her arithmetic and told her about God. She saw the world through his eyes, trusted his wisdom, and found comfort in his quiet strength.

"Valentinus, does God really hear our prayers?" Julia asked one day.

"Yes, my child, He hears each one."

"Do you know what I pray for every morning and every night? I pray that I might see. I want so much to see everything you've told me about!"

"God does what is best for us if we will only believe in Him," Valentinus said.

"Oh, Valentinus, I do believe! I do!" She knelt and grasped his hand.

They sat quietly together, each praying. Suddenly there was a brilliant light in the prison cell. Radiant, Julia screamed, "Valentinus, I can see! I can see!"

"Praise be to God!" Valentinus exclaimed, and he knelt in prayer.

On the eve of his death Valentinus wrote a last note to Julia, urging her to stay close to God. He signed it, "From your Valentine." His sentence was carried out the next day, February 14, 270 A.D., near a gate that was later named Porta Valentini in his memory. He was buried at what is now the Church of Praxedes in Rome. It is said that Julia planted a pink-blossomed almond tree near his grave. Today, the almond tree remains a symbol of abiding love and friendship. On each February 14, Saint Valentine's Day, messages of affection, love, and devotion are exchanged around the world."

## Don't Forget: WGHS's A-Men performing at 4:30pm on Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>

*ORIGINS OF MARDI GRAS*, another holiday that has become popular in the month of February.

This celebration dates back just as long as Valentine's Day. According to historians, Mardi Gras dates back thousands of years to pagan celebrations of spring and fertility, including the raucous Roman festivals of Saturnalia and Lupercalia. When Christianity arrived in Rome, religious leaders decided to incorporate these popular local traditions into the new faith, an easier task than abolishing them altogether. As a result, the excess and debauchery of the Mardi Gras season became a prelude to Lent, the 40 days of penance between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Along with Christianity, Mardi Gras spread from Rome to other European countries, including France, Germany, Spain and England.

Traditionally, in the days leading up to Lent, merrymakers would binge on all the meat, eggs, milk and cheese that remained in their homes, preparing for several weeks of eating only fish and fasting. In France, the day before Ash Wednesday came to be known as Mardi Gras, or "Fat Tuesday." The word "carnival," another common name for the pre-Lenten festivities, may also derive from this vegetarian-unfriendly custom: in Medieval Latin, carnelevarium means to take away or remove meat. Carnivale in Brazil is now one of the largest annual celebrations in the world. New Orleans is the US's epicenter of Mardi Gras celebrations lasting the six days before Lent. The St. Louis Mardi Gras Parade held annually in Soulard is now the second largest celebration in The United States of America.