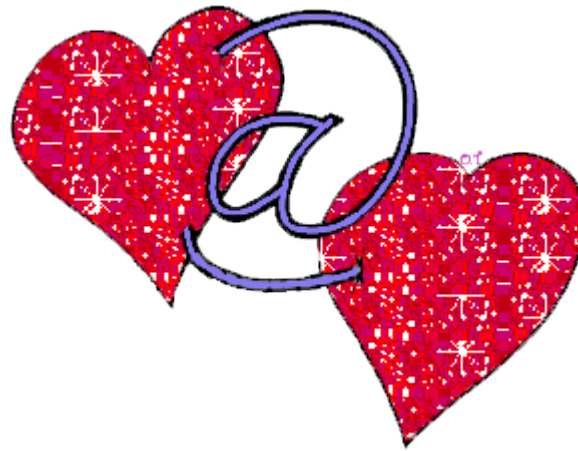




St. Valentine's Day





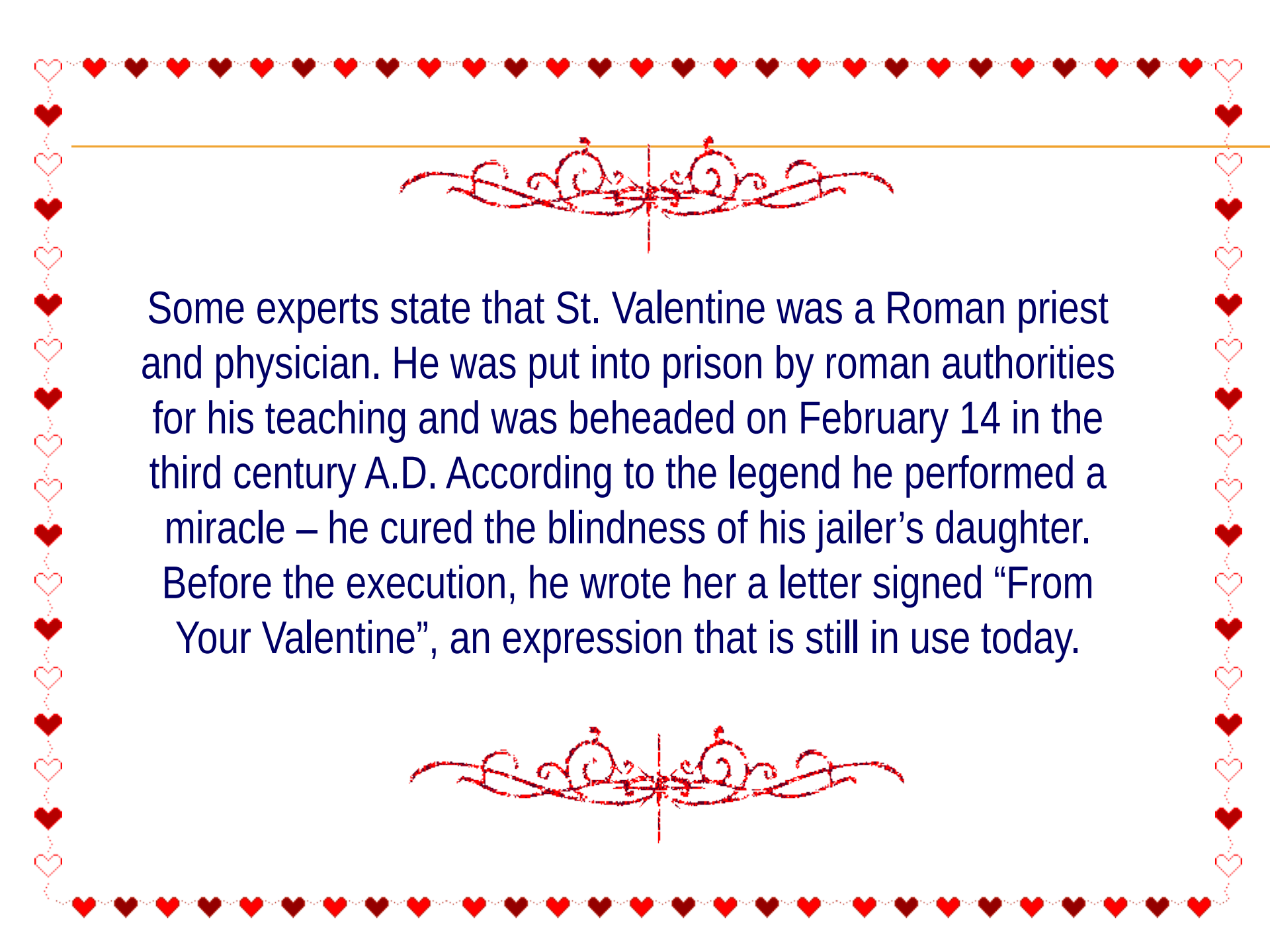
Every February, candy, flowers, and gifts are exchanged between loved ones, all in the name of St. Valentine. The history of Valentine's Day and its patron saint is shrouded in mystery, but we do know that February has long been a month of romance. St. Valentine's Day, as we know it today, is a mix of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition.



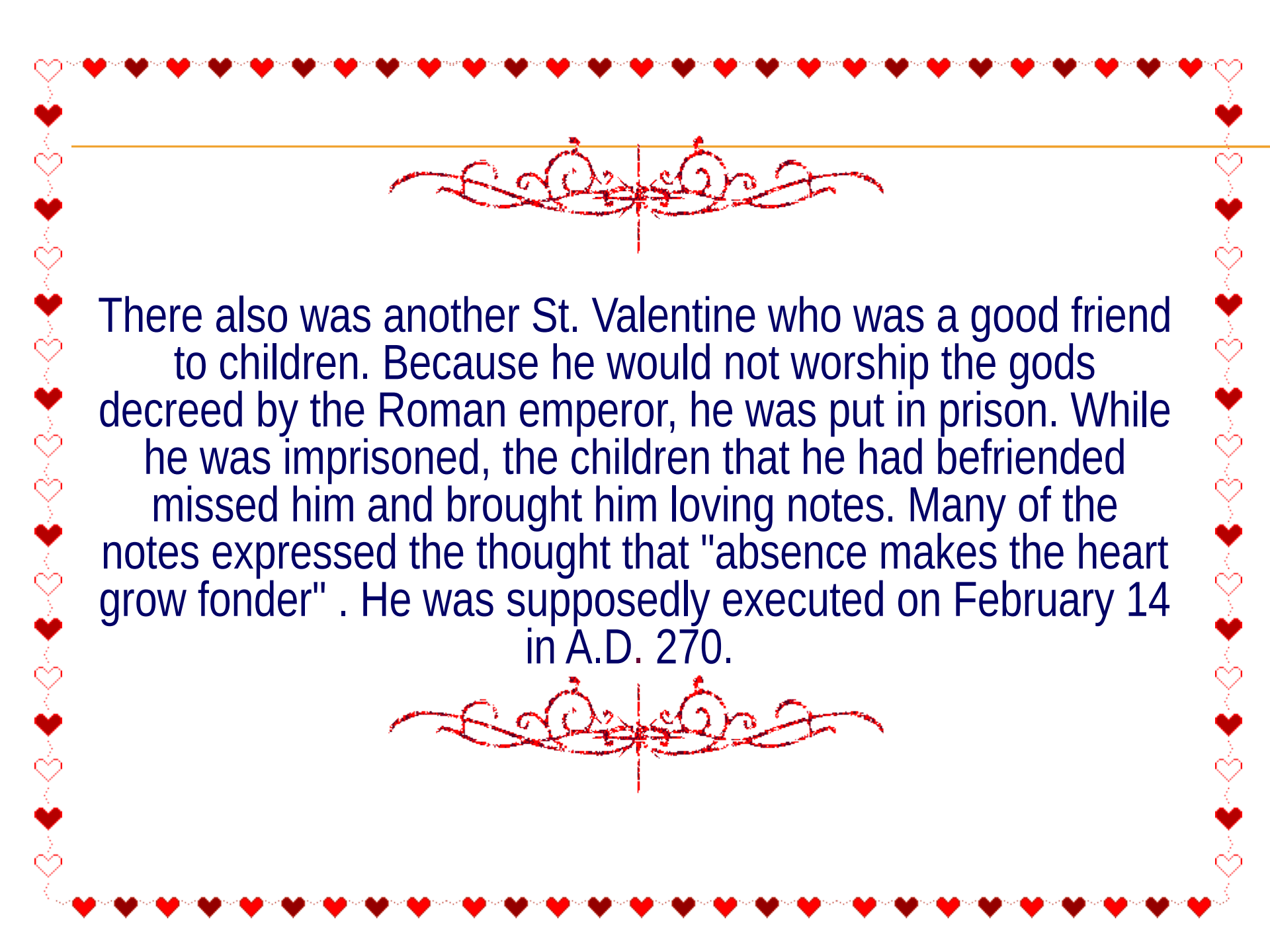
Many historians, however, seem to trace Valentine's Day to an ancient Roman festival called Lupercalia. This was held on February 15 to honor Faunus, the god of animal life, hunting, herding, the patron of husbandry, and the guardian of the secret lore of nature. After Christianity spread, some think this pagan festival eventually became Valentine's Day.



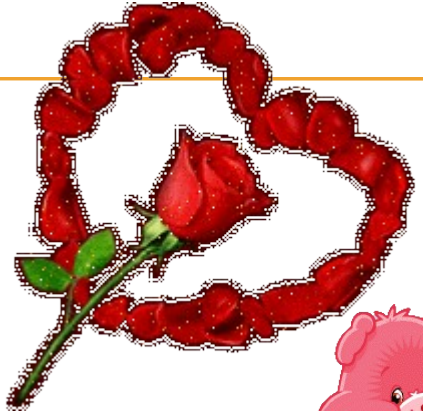
Other experts connect Valentine's Day with two saints of the early Christian church. According to one story, St. Valentine's was a priest who would marry young couples against the orders of the Roman Emperor Claudius II, who believed that single young men made better soldiers. This story goes back to about A.D. 200.



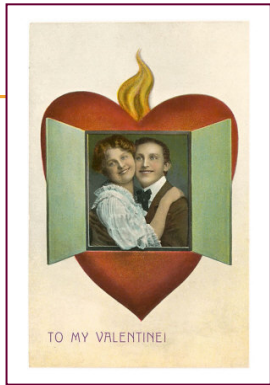
Some experts state that St. Valentine was a Roman priest and physician. He was put into prison by roman authorities for his teaching and was beheaded on February 14 in the third century A.D. According to the legend he performed a miracle – he cured the blindness of his jailer’s daughter. Before the execution, he wrote her a letter signed “From Your Valentine”, an expression that is still in use today.



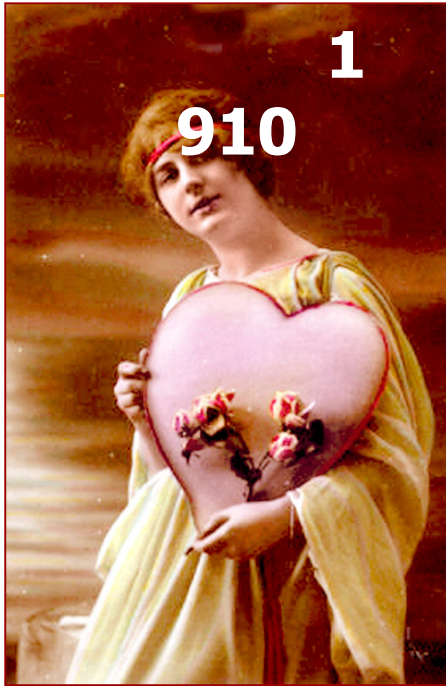
There also was another St. Valentine who was a good friend to children. Because he would not worship the gods decreed by the Roman emperor, he was put in prison. While he was imprisoned, the children that he had befriended missed him and brought him loving notes. Many of the notes expressed the thought that "absence makes the heart grow fonder" . He was supposedly executed on February 14 in A.D. 270.



Whatever the origin, Valentine's Day is celebrated in many parts of the world today and is a holiday for both young and old. This day became the date for exchanging love messages and St. Valentine became the patron saint of lovers. The date was marked by sending cards, poems and simple gifts such as toys and flowers.



One billion valentine cards are sent each year, making Valentine's Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year. (An estimated 2.6 billion cards are sent for Christmas.) Approximately 85 percent of all valentines are purchased by women. In addition to the United States, Valentine's Day is celebrated in Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, France, and Australia.



The customs of sending valentine cards started in Europe in the 1700s. Commercial valentines were first made in the early 1800s. Kate Greenaway, a British artist, was one of the leading makers of valentines. Her valentines are known for her drawing of little children and the varied shades of blues and greens that she favored.

Valentine Traditions

- Hundreds of years ago in England, many children dressed up as adults on Valentine's Day. They went singing from home to home. One verse they sang was:

Good morning to you, valentine;
Curl your locks as I do mine -
Two before and three behind.
Good morning to you, valentine.

- In Wales wooden love spoons were carved and given as gifts on February 14th. Hearts, keys and keyholes were favourite decorations on the spoons. The decoration meant "You unlock my heart!"
- In the Middle Ages, young men and women drew names from a bowl to see who their valentines would be. They would wear these names on their sleeves for one week. To wear your heart on your sleeve now means that it is easy for other people to know how you are feeling.



Another tradition of St. Valentine's Day is making special cakes.

There're many symbols of Valentine's Day.

Red Heart



A long time ago, people believed that all the emotions were found in the heart. The heart is still a symbol of love, and it is also a symbol of Valentine's Day.



Red Rose



The rose was the flower of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. Red is a color that stands for strong feelings. This is why the red rose is a flower of love.



Ribbons

Ribbons go back to the days when ladies gave ribbons to their favorite knights when they went to war.





Lace



Lace comes from a latin word, it means “to catch”. Lace was supposed to catch the heart of a loved one.

Lovebirds and Doves



Lovebirds are colorful parrots found in Africa. They are called love birds because they sit closely together in pairs.

Doves were thought to be favorite birds of Venus. These birds are symbols of loyalty and love. They are also symbols of Valentine's Day.

Cupid



One of the most famous valentine symbol is Cupid. He is a son of Venus, goddess of love. He could cause people to fall in love by piercing them with one of his magic arrows.

Happy Valentine's Day!