



The Messenger

Messenger Project Newsletter

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Messenger Notes

Messenger hopes to release their sixth CD, titled **Messenger Project**, later this summer. The recordings are progressing steadily and should be ready for mixing soon. The music was delayed this January and February in preparation for **Lionel De Leon's** marriage to **Joie Verona** on Valentine's Day. **Skip Hahn** was the best man. The newlyweds spent their honeymoon in New Mexico, the "land of enchantment."

Lionel and Joie (pronounced "joy") De Leon will be performing Songs from Scripture at a youth correctional camp in Calabasas this coming April and at a mental health facility in the City of Commerce in June.

Valentine's Day

In ancient Rome, February 14th was a holiday to honor Juno, the queen of the Roman Gods and Goddesses (also known as the Goddess of women and marriage). The following day (February 15th) began the Feast of Lupercalia. It seems probable that the name of the festival was derived from *lupus* ("wolf"). In general, the ancients viewed the Lupercalia as a purification and fertility rite. The ritual involved the sacrifice of goats and a dog in the Lupercal by priests called *Luperci*, who smeared the foreheads of two noble young men with the blood of the sacrificed animals and then wiped it off. At this point, the youths were required to laugh. Then the *luperci*, clothed in loincloths, ran about the area, lashing everyone they met with strips of skin from the sacrificed goats. Young wives were particularly eager to receive these blows, because it was believed that the ritual promoted fertility and easy childbirth. These ceremonies were accompanied by much revelry and drinking.

On the eve of the festival of Lupercalia, the names of Roman girls were written on slips of paper and placed into 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 whom he chose. Sometimes the pairing lasted an entire year, and often the young couple would fall in love and later marry.

Under the rule of Emperor Claudius II, Rome was involved in bloody and unpopular campaigns. Claudius the Cruel had a hard time getting soldiers to join his military leagues. He believed the reason was that men didn't want to leave their loves or families, so he cancelled marriages in Rome.

Saint Valentine secretly married couples, and was dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who condemned him to be beaten to death with clubs and to have his head cut off. He suffered martyrdom on the 14th day of February, about the year 270.

In 494 AD, the Pope made February 15 the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. In 496 A.D., Pope Gelasius set aside February 14th to honor St. Valentine and it gradually became the date for exchanging love messages. Saint Valentine became the patron saint of lovers. The date was marked by sending poems and simple gifts such as flowers. Commercial valentines were introduced in the 1800's.

Ash Wednesday

The name *dies cinerum* (day of ashes) is found in the earliest existing copies of the Gregorian Sacramentary and probably dates from at least the eighth century. On this day, all the faithful approach the altar, where the priest dips his thumb into blessed ashes and marks

the forehead of each with a cross, saying the words: "Remember man that thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return." The ashes are made by burning the remains of the palms blessed on the Palm Sunday of the previous year. The ashes are sprinkled with holy water and fumigated with incense.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, which is the forty days before Easter Sunday (the Resurrection). It is a time of humility, repentance and abstinence in remembrance of Jesus' fasting in the desert before he began his ministry.

Bible Study

The Bible is more than a book that we read for inspiration, wisdom and truth. It is the very word of God. I spend my life studying its pages and still only scratch the surface of its richness and complexity. So often, verses take on new meanings as they relate to chapters in my personal life. God's book is a blueprint for godly living, personified in Jesus Christ (who was God in the flesh). The Bible contains the "good news" (gospel) that Jesus died for our sins. There is nothing we can do to earn our way into heaven except thank God for his sacrifice on our behalf and believe in his Son. "Whoever rejects the son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (Jn 3:36).

When I study the Bible, I witness a love story. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jn 3:16).

May God's love abide in us and radiate around us, so many may believe in Jesus and follow him as faithful Christians.