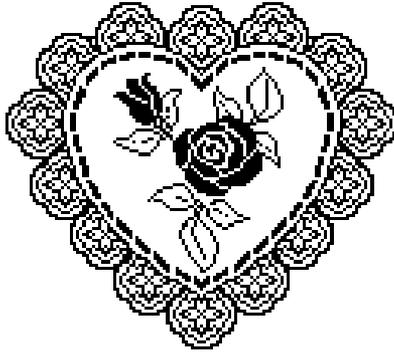


A CELEBRATION  
OF LOVE AND  
COMMITMENT

*in music, poetry, prayer and song*

for

St. Valentine's Day



at St. Andrew's Church, Romford

## ST. VALENTINE

Every February sweets, flowers, and gifts are exchanged between loved ones, all in the name of St. Valentine. But who is this mysterious saint and why do we celebrate this holiday? 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, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. So, who was Saint Valentine and how did he become associated with this ancient rite? Today, the Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred.

One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men -- his crop of potential soldiers. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death. Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured.

According to one legend, Valentine actually sent the first 'valentine' greeting himself. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl -- who may have been his jailor's daughter -- who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter, which he signed 'From your Valentine,' an expression that is still in use today. Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, the stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic, and, most importantly, romantic figure. The popular customs associated with Saint Valentine's Day undoubtedly had their origin in a conventional belief generally received in England and France during the Middle Ages, that on 14 February, i.e. half way through the second month of the year, the birds began to pair. Thus in Chaucer's *Parliament of Foules* we read:

*For this was sent on Seynt Valentyne's day  
Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.*

For this reason the day was looked upon as specially consecrated to lovers and as a proper occasion for writing love letters and sending lovers' tokens.

# A CELEBRATION OF LOVE AND COMMITMENT



## Music

### **THE WELCOME** *followed by the hymn:*

1. GOD is Love: let heav'n adore him God is love: let earth rejoice;  
Let creation sing before him,  
And exalt him with one voice.  
He who laid the earth's foundation,  
He who spread the heav'ns above,  
He who breathes through all creation,  
He is Love, eternal Love.

3. God is love: and though with blindness  
Sin affects the souls of men,  
God's eternal loving-kindness  
Holds and guides them even then.  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
O'er us final triumph gain;  
God is love, so Love for ever  
O'er the universe must reign

## READINGS and MUSIC

### A Poem

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of being and ideal grace.  
I love thee to the level of every day's  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.

I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.  
I love thee with the passion put to use  
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.  
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose  
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,  
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,  
I shall but love thee better after death.

*(Elizabeth Barrett-Browning)*

**Music** *Preludes 1 No. 8 – Le fille aux cheveux de lin (Debussy)*

## **A Poem**

Late have I loved you, O beauty ever ancient, ever new!  
Late have I loved you  
And behold, you were within, and I without, and without I sought you.  
And deformed, I ran after those forms of beauty you have made.  
You were with me, and I was not with you,  
those things held me back from you,  
things whose only being was to be in you.  
You called, you cried, and you broke through my deafness.  
You illumined, you shone, and you chased away my blindness.  
You became fragrant and I inhaled and sighed for you.  
I tasted, and now hunger and thirst for you.  
You tasted me and I burned for your embrace.

*(St. Augustine)*

**Music** *Melodie op. 42 op. 3 (Tchaikovsky)*

**A READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN (15: 9-17)**

## **AN AFFIRMATION OF LOVE**

To be fully human is to be able to give and receive love. Throughout history humanity has sought to ground this through vows, promises and covenants, public declarations of commitment that bind people in enduring relationship. The Bible tells the story of God's covenant with human beings. God's covenant with Israel was the basis of the people's liberation from slavery and exile. God's covenant with the followers of Jesus brings us into a new community where there is no male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, but one people united in Christ.

All our relationships can be signs of God's faithfulness and love, living expressions of God's promises to us and sources of hope to others. Today we gather to celebrate our loving commitments.

*The priest then invites those who wish to re-affirm their relationships to come forward.*

Do you wish to re-affirm your covenant of love and fidelity?  
**I do.**

Will you be faithful to the one you love?  
**I will, with God's help.**

Will you support one another in love?  
**I will, with God's help.**

*S/He then invites all couples to stand and face each other. Taking each other by the hands, each says to the other in turn.*

**I re-affirm my covenant with you.  
To love you, trust you, and delight in you.  
To share your burdens and your joys.  
I will go with you wherever life leads you.  
This remains my solemn vow.**

*S/He then invites everyone to light a candle as a sign of the light their relationship brings to the life of all as the following prayers are offered:*

Abundant God, Lover of all creation, pour out your blessing on us and the covenant we have celebrated.

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our solitude and our companionship,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our acts of tenderness and intimacy,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our delight at knowing and being known,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our acts of self-sacrifice to build up one another,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our being comfort to each other,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our passion for justice,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In our generosity and tenacity,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

In all our fruitfulness,

**May we be blessed by you for ever.**

Let us pray.

We give thanks and praise to you, O gracious God,  
for your unfailing love and wonderful deeds among us:  
for the splendour of creation, the beauty of this world,  
the mystery of our lives and the surprises of human love.

We give you thanks and praise because you create in us  
the desire for intimacy and companionship,  
calling us out of isolation and exile,  
and embracing us in a family of friends and loved ones.

Pour out your abundant blessing upon those gathered here.

May they grow in love for one another and for all your creation.

Lead them into accomplishments that satisfy and delight.

Grant that in the years ahead they may continue to be faithful  
to the promises they have made,

and that in the strength of the Holy Spirit

they may continue to grow together in the love, joy, and peace  
of our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

*Roses are shared*



## HYMN

1. Love Divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
All thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
Pure unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation,  
Enter every trembling heart.

2. Come, almighty to deliver,  
Let us all thy life receive;  
Suddenly return and never,  
Never more they temples leave,  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
Serve thee as thy hosts above,  
Pray and praise thee, without ceasing,  
Glory in thy perfect love.

3. Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see they great salvation,  
Perfectly restored in thee.  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love and praise!

## Final Poem

I love you not only for what you are  
but for what I am when I'm with you.  
I love you not only for what you have made of yourself  
but what you are making of me;  
I love you for putting your hand into my heart  
and passing over all the foolish weak things,  
and drawing out in the light all the beautiful things  
that no one else had looked quite far enough to find.

## THE BLESSING

May you find the love of God  
in every sunrise and sunset  
and every fragrant flower;  
In rainbows whose end is not golden,  
but the promise of a bright new day;  
May you find God's love flowing  
in each ripple of a tumbling stream.  
May His love wash over you  
with every moonlight beam.  
May you find His promise hidden  
in the welcome of a friend;  
and may your road of friendship  
continue without end.



Music: