

PHYLCIA MASONHEIMER



SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS

YOUR GUIDE TO CELEBRATING
THE GOSPEL THROUGH CHURCH HOLIDAYS

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Let's Celebrate!

How to use this book

When we first produced seasonal celebrations, we were creating digital e-books that were heavily-linked and provided a lot of information in a small format. We are excited to now offer the physical complation of those e-books, but we still wanted to include links to all the same resources that the e-books pointed to.

Our solution? QR codes sprinked throughout the chapters! As you read along, don't hesitate to grab your smart phone and scan the codes to access some of the many resources that Phy has compiled.

Enjoy the holidays!

-Eric Novak
Creative Director,
Every Woman a Theologian



Celebrate
Valentine's
Day

Why Celebrate

Valentine's Day?

About a decade ago, I first read the book *The Happiness Project* by Gretchen Rubin. She's one of my favorite secular authors, and I've since read that book two more times! In it, she describes small changes she made to her days to cultivate happiness, joy, and intimacy with her community. One of the things she suggested: "Celebrate small holidays."

I grew up celebrating Valentine's Day with my whole family. My dad would leave little bags of candy on the kitchen counter for each of us kids. Mom, of course, got the biggest basket of goodies!

Now that Josh and I have our own family, we've adopted a similar way of celebrating the holiday by taking it back to its roots: loving ALL people, not just the person to whom you're married. Valentine's Day is an opportunity to love our neighbors and friends, to reach out to those who are home-bound, and to bring some light to lives in the middle of winter. The best part? When we see this holiday as a time of pouring-out, we find our relationship status (or how well our spouse remembers the holiday) less pressing.

In this short guide, I will be sharing some ideas and resources for making the most of this church holiday, taking it all the way back to the original meaning: selfless love.

History of Valentine's Day

For many, Valentine's Day represents romance. The weeks leading up to it buzz with excitement over finding "The One." Hallmark movies with cute (but impossible) story lines and wintry scenes in New York City lead us to believe that true love is a world of constant romance. But once the holiday is over, the daily grind reminds us that love isn't a succession of gifts and flowers. The cupid-and-flowers element of Valentine's Day finds its origins in Chaucer's poetry in the 1400s. It was expanded on during the Victorian era, when a "valentine" was a person or lover to whom one would send cards and gifts. Eventually, the word "valentine" came to represent the card itself.

But according to medieval church legend, there was a man who not only believed in true love, but who also defended it—to the point of death.

Saint Valentine (whose name comes from the Latin *valeo*, 'to be strong') was supposedly a priest who lived in the third century, somewhere around AD 240–



270. At this time, the Roman Empire was still in power, specifically under the rule of the Emperor Claudius. Claudius believed soldiers fought better without distraction, and that marriage—especially for young men—was exactly the kind of distraction to avoid. In line with his view of marriage, Claudius outlawed it for the young citizens of the Roman Empire.

Polygamy—usually one man married to several women—was also a common practice of the time. For young Christians living in the Roman Empire, the hope for a biblical marriage was assaulted by both the culture and the government. Those who got married could be punished, as could the officials who oversaw the ceremony. This is where Saint Valentine was involved.

Based on his actions, it can be assumed that Valentine believed young people should be free to marry according to God's design. So he began to perform secret ceremonies for Christian couples against the emperor's edict, endangering his own life. Before long, Claudius discovered what Valentine was doing. The priest was arrested and thereafter condemned to a threefold martyrdom on February 14th: beating, stoning, and beheading.

This graphic story doesn't sound much like roses and hearts. Yet it reflects a level of meaning much deeper than the Valentine's Day we know today. Today we celebrate love as an emotion; Valentine died for love as a choice.



The stories surrounding Valentine's life and death may be legend. The Catholic Church eventually removed him from the list of saints' days because much of his story could not be verified. Further, he is likely a conglomeration of multiple Christian "Valentines," since the name is attributed to more than one person from that time period. But we know for sure that the Valentine celebrated by the early church died for his faith in Christ and willfully disobeyed the emperor for the sake of his brethren. The lack of records from his life is typical of early church martyrs, whose Roman court records were often destroyed during the Great Persecution of the 400s.

Valentine's example of brotherly love—agape love—isn't something we think about on Valentine's Day. But what if we did? Perhaps the singles, the widow and widower, and the single parent, wouldn't feel like they are left out from the holiday. Because Valentine's Day wasn't about eros-love in the first place.

While emotion is indeed a part of love, true love is made of sacrifice and commitment. Each couple who asked Valentine to marry them was willfully disobeying the emperor's edict. In choosing love, they were risking everything. In choosing to marry them, Valentine lost his life.

As we talk about Valentine with friends and family, his story reminds us to keep love for Christ, and therefore love for others, forefront to our decisions.

*"'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied:
'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.
This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as
yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'"*
- Matthew 26:33-40

Scripture Readings

Psalm 136
Zephaniah 3:17
John 3
Romans 8:35-39
1 Corinthians 13
1 John 4

Valentine's Day Liturgy

*On this Valentine's Day, we remember:
The selfless love of the man who died for
Christ,
who died to protect the sacrament of
marriage,
who died for love.*

*When we think about love today,
may we remember:
love is not about what we get
or how we feel
or whether it is reciprocated.*

*Love is patient and kind,
love is freely given and wholly humble,
love believes the best and bears the worst.*

*Love is not summed up by a relationship
status
nor is it limited to wedding rings.
Love is the knock on a neighbor's door,
the ear bent to listen, the tongue restrained;*

*love is washing the dishes half asleep
to baby hands in the middle of the night.*

*Love is an open table and a swinging door,
ready to welcome, happy to hope.*

*On this Valentine's Day
we remember:*

We love... because He first loved us.

Playlists

I made two playlists: one for those lovey-dovey feels and one for worship! Full disclosure: my music taste is very diverse but leans heavily toward oldies and country, so if that's not your style, the love song playlist may not be your jam. I added in some songs of other genres as well.



Spotify Love Song Playlist



Spotify Worship Playlist

Crafts

Crafts and decorating are big in our home. We love how they complete small holidays. Plus they keep the kiddos busy! This year, we made the following crafts. You'll need basic craft supplies like construction paper, scissors, glue, a stapler, canning jars, and acrylic paint.

We also grabbed some heart garlands from Meijer (our grocery store) and some foam heart stickers that the girls decorated the windows with. You could also cut out hearts from paper, tape to the window, and spray with fake snow to leave heart imprints! We hang our heart garland from the ceiling beams, but you can also drape it across the art or mirror in your dining or living room.

For the vases, I grabbed three bouquets from Costco (baby's breath, carnations, and greenery) and arranged flowers for the table. We used extra canning jars to make small baby's breath bouquets for friends. We also grabbed a small metal mailbox (about \$12) from Meijer, added it to our flower centerpiece and used it to leave "love notes" throughout the week—leave the flag up when you drop a message!



Thumbprint Heart Painted
Vases (with Ball Jars)



Valentines Paper Chain



Foam Heart Table Runner



We also grab a pack of valentines (the girls chose Frozen-themed) to send to friends and family. Our girls aren't in school, but they have lots of little friends, so we sent valentines via mail. How fun is it for kids to receive something via USPS?! Have your kids write names on the valentines and put them in a pretty card with a little note. If you want to ship something a little bigger, you could send a bubble mailer with some candy inside (this generally costs us \$3.50 to ship via USPS).

On Valentine's Day itself, we use our All Saints' Day baskets and fill them with candy for the kids.

Lastly, we make frosted sugar cookies with pink and red icing, bag them up, and deliver to our neighbors. Many of our neighbors have dogs, so we make homemade dog treats for the pups too!



Gluten Free Sugar Cookies



Homemade Dog Treats

Hallmark Movie Recommendations

I know, I know, I bashed them a little at the beginning—but if you want to add a little cheesy romance to the holiday, here are some of my favorite Hallmark Movies. You can watch them in the Hallmark Now app with a monthly subscription (I think it's \$7). I'm a snobby movie reviewer, so these are the best of the (cough, many) Hallmark movies I've seen.

The Magic of Ordinary Days

Forever in My Heart

Loving Leah

Home for Harvest

In My Dreams

The Makeover

The Dater's Handbook

Book Recommendations

For children, the following books talk about Saint Valentine:

Saint Valentine by Robert Sabuda

Saint Valentine by Laura Wagner

For adults, there isn't exactly a single book on Valentine, so here are some church history recommendations, as well as some books that encourage love for God and for others:

Church History by Bruce Shelley

History of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez

Delighting in the Trinity by Michael Reeves

Crazy Love by Francis Chan

Long Obedience the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society by Eugene Peterson

Galentine's Brunch

Though Leslie Knope made it famous, I like to think I was ahead of the curve in celebrating Valentine's Day with my girlfriends. This is a great way to bring singles, widows, and those separated from their spouse by work or military into your community during the holiday. Our girl-gang loves to do a Valentine's

brunch. Every lady brings a dish to pass, we make mimosas and coffee, and we sit around to chat for a few hours! It's quite simple but makes for a fun afternoon. You could also add one of the Hallmark movies I mentioned to integrate a few laughs. I like to make waffles (with a lot of toppings) as the main course. Here are some more ideas:



Galentine's Day Ideas that Aren't a Brunch



Virtual Galentine's Celebration Ideas



Brunch Ideas and Recipes



A Breathtakingly Beautiful Brunch



Some Galentine's Recipes



Valentine's Day Recipes

One of our longstanding traditions is to make pink gluten free pancakes for breakfast on Valentine's Day, complete with whipped cream and pink sprinkles! If that's not your thing, here are some other ideas from my friend Chels.



Almond waffles with
raspberry basil sauce



Chocolate
red wine cake



Strawberry Nutella
hand pies



Valentine's Day
Oreo truffles



Red velvet latte



Including your kids in cooking can be difficult, but it's so good for their sensory learning and engagement! If you feel like you're struggling to include them in the full recipe, a whisk, big bowl, and some ice cubes works just as great to occupy busy hands and minds as they copy mommy and daddy.

Coloring Page

As your kids (or you!) color this picture of Valentine, talk about his story and the principles we can apply today. Read through the Scripture passages listed on the previous pages and ask:

What do I learn about God from these verses?

How does this change how I live?

What can I do today to walk out these truths?

I hope your Valentine's Day is a blessed and joyful time of discipleship, growth, and love for God and others!

Phyllicia Mazonheimer

*Download and
print me!*



Valentine ♥



Celebrate
St. Patrick's
Day

Why Celebrate

Saint Patrick's Day?

If you're not Irish, why celebrate Saint Patrick's Day? While Patrick is a distinctly Irish character and the patron saint of Ireland, his work is inspiring for the rest of Christendom too! Today's St. Patrick's Day has devolved into little more than a corporate pub crawl—which according to Encyclopedia Britannica began with Irish immigrants to America, not in Ireland itself. But we can redeem the holiday and bring it back to the original person it's about: Patrick, a missionary to Ireland.

The True Story of Saint Patrick

At the age of 16, Patrick (originally, Patricius) was taken captive from his native land of Roman Britain and taken to Ireland as a slave. He came from a religious family: his father was a deacon and his grandfather a priest. Patrick, however, was not a Christian.

However, during his enslavement tending animals or sometime after, Patrick came to Christ. He eventually escaped, and in 432 he came back to the land that enslaved him to bring the good news of the gospel to its people. Patrick's *Confessio* is the most detailed of the two documents he is believed to have written; it's also the most biographical.

Saint Patrick's Day on March 17th commemorates the supposed date of Patrick's death. Over time Patrick and his day have come to represent Irish culture as a whole. In celebrating St. Patrick, we can focus on his mission and evangelistic work while also honoring the culture in which he lived and witnessed.

Further down in this guide, I have included some great books for read-alouds that flesh out Patrick's full story!

Scripture Readings

Patrick was a brave, Spirit-empowered Christian who obeyed God even when it was difficult. These passages talk about how to share your faith with a heart like Patrick.

Matthew 28:19-20

Romans 1:16



Galatians 6:9

Acts 1:8

1 Peter 3:15

Saint Patrick's Day Liturgy

This prayer is attributed to Patrick, though the author is most likely anonymous. In Ireland, Saint Patrick's Day is largely a Catholic holiday. The Protestant churches that celebrate will often read St. Patrick's Breastplate communally as part of the celebration (this is according to the response of my Irish community).

I have included the entire prayer, though it is common to only read the last fifteen lines:

I arise today

Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,

Through belief in the Threeness,

Through confession of the Oneness

of the Creator of creation.

I arise today

Through the strength of Christ's birth with

His baptism,

Through the strength of His crucifixion with

His burial,

Through the strength of His resurrection

with His ascension,

*Through the strength of His descent for the
judgment of doom.*

I arise today

*Through the strength of the love of
cherubim,*

In the obedience of angels,

In the service of archangels,

*In the hope of resurrection to meet with
reward,*

In the prayers of patriarchs,

In the predictions of prophets,

In the preaching of apostles,

In the faith of confessors,

In the innocence of holy virgins,

In the deeds of righteous men.

I arise today, through

The strength of heaven,

The light of the sun,

The radiance of the moon,

The splendor of fire,

The speed of lightning,

The swiftness of wind,

The depth of the sea,

The stability of the earth,

The firmness of rock.

I arise today, through

God's strength to pilot me,

God's might to uphold me,

God's wisdom to guide me,

God's eye to look before me,

God's ear to hear me,

God's word to speak for me,

God's hand to guard me,

God's shield to protect me,

God's host to save me

From snares of devils.

Christ when I sit down,

Christ when I arise,

*Christ in the heart of every man who thinks
of me,*

*Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks
of me,*

Christ in every eye that sees me,

Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise today

*Through a mighty strength, the invocation
of the Trinity,*

Through belief in the Threeness,

*Through confession of the Oneness
of the Creator of creation.*

Be Thou My Vision

This classic Irish hymn has an ancient and fascinating history. The lyrics we know today were developed from the original Irish by two women: Mary Byrne and Eleanor Hull. Mary translated it, and Eleanor later versified it.

Irish liturgy scholar Helen Phelan said this about the hymn's language: "One of the essential characteristics of the text is the use of 'heroic' imagery to describe God. This was very typical of medieval Irish poetry, which cast God as the 'chieftain' or 'High King' (Ard Ri) who provided protection to His people or clan. The loric is one of the most popular forms of this kind of protection prayer and is very prevalent in texts of this period."

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart /
Naught be all else to me, save that thou art /
Thou my best thought, by day or by night /
Waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true
word / I ever with thee and thou with me,
Lord / Thou my great Father, and I thy true
son / Thou in me dwelling and I with thee
one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
/ Thou mine inheritance, now and always /
Thou and thou only first in my heart / High
King of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*High King of heaven, my victory won /
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's
sun. / Heart of my own heart, whatever
befall / Still be my vision, O ruler of all.*



Playlists



Irish Worship
Playlist



Cultural Irish
Playlist

St. Patrick's Recipes

Irish food is a lot of fun, and is fairly hearty. In addition to the meal you prepare, make sure to grab some tea and digestives: Barry's Tea, Lyon's Tea, Bewleys, and Custard Cremes.



Grandma's Irish
Soda Bread



Modern
Colcannon



Traditional Irish
Breakfast

I also recommend playing Irish music as a family if you have a piano or other instrument available! Many Irish folk songs are available for free online. Here are some of our favorites:

Soldier's Joy
The Wind That Shakes the Barley
The Wearin' of the Green
Kathleen Mavourneen
The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls
My Wild Irish Rose
Danny Boy
Fisherman's Hornpipe
The Flowers of Edinburgh

Crafts



Trinity Shamrock
Craft



St Patrick's
Miter Craft



St Patrick's
Gold Slime

If you're decorating for St. Patrick's, you can buy a pack of St Patrick's Day Decor and Shamrock Window Clings on Amazon, or placemats from Home Goods.

Book Recommendations

For kids:

Patrick: Patron Saint of Ireland by Tomie de Paola

St. Patrick's Day by Gail Gibbons

Jamie O'Rourke and the Big Potato by Tomie de Paola

Loyola Kids Book of Saints (Catholic)

Saint Patrick by William Federer

For adults:

St Patrick of Ireland by Philip Freeman

The Confession of Saint Patrick



Movie Recommendations

I have starred the movies I've personally seen. The others were recommended by Irish followers of mine: *The Quiet Man, *Leap Year, *Philomena, *PS I Love You, Song of the Sea, The Secret of Kells, Brooklyn, and The Wind That Shakes the Barley.

Coloring Page

As your kids (or you!) color this picture of St Patrick, talk about his story and the principles we can apply today. Read through the passages listed on the previous pages and ask:

What do I learn about God from these verses?

How does this change how I live?

What can I do today to walk out these truths?

I hope your St. Patrick's Day is a blessed and joyful time of discipleship, growth, and love for God and others!

Phylisia Mazonheimer

*Download and
print me!*



Patrick



Celebrate
Easter

Why Celebrate

Easter?

Easter: a celebration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and . . . bunnies and eggs? How did a Christian liturgical celebration become a commercialized holiday about candy and spring? In this section, we will explore the history of Easter, the difference between Passover and Easter (and why they became distinct), and the significance of Easter for Christians today. We will also discuss the accusation that Easter is “pagan” and connected to the Anglo-Saxon fertility goddess, Eostre.

Included is a celebration guide for Easter to help focus you and your family on the intent of the season: celebrating Christ’s resurrection, which is the confirmation of our hope (1 Cor. 15).

A Timeline of Easter’s Development

What Christians have traditionally called “The Last Supper” was in fact Jesus’ last Passover. This meal with His disciples came right before Jesus’ betrayal, trial, and crucifixion. Since early Christians were mostly Jewish, they naturally continued to celebrate Passover but integrated the celebration of Christ’s death and resurrection into the holiday (like Messianic Jews do today).

It didn’t take long, however, for controversy to arise. Within the very first century—as Gentiles (non-Jews) began to join the church in droves—there came to be a divide between those who celebrated a Messianic Passover and those who observed the Resurrection without the Jewish overtures. This new celebration carried with it much Jewish influence: a short 1-3 day fast before the meal, a vigil the night before the celebration, and a feast. Even the word for this celebration was connected to Passover. One of the earliest glimpses of Easter celebrations are found in the writings of Melito, a Jewish convert to Christianity who wrote about Easter in his work, *On Pascha*. ‘Pascha’ comes from the Hebrew word *pisach*, the term for the Passover sacrificial lamb.

The arguments over Easter’s date and whether it should happen at the same time as Passover or if it should be a distinct event carried on for centuries. Eventually this debate was titled “the Quartodeciman Controversy.”

