

HAPPY NEW YEAR



W A T E R H O U S E S Y M B O L I S M N E W S L E T T E R # 5 5

SPECIAL SYMBOLS

- Hourglass conveys passage of time
- God Janus conveys ending one year and beginning another
- Grapes convey fertility, sacrifice and the Eucharist
- Pomegranates convey fecundity, royalty, Christ, and autumn

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F a t h e r T i m e a n d B a b y N e w Y e a r

Happy New Year. I am a little late getting this out to you because I was in Georgia over the holidays.

Probably the most familiar symbol of the New Year is Father Time and Baby New Year as seen to your right. Father time is dressed in a long robe wearing a sash across his chest with the previous year printed on it. He is the personification of time and usually carries an hourglass and a scythe.

Hourglass conveys the passage of time, inversion, evanescence, creation and destruction, perpetual inversion of the upper and lower worlds, death, nighttime as opposed to the sundial which conveys



Saturday Evening post cover for December 31, 1910 by J.C. Leyendecker

daytime. It is also the attribute of the Grim Reaper. The scythe conveys time, death, autumn, harvest, death of the old year, related to the moon (because of the crescent

blade), weapon of peasants, passivity, castration, phallus, the inexorable passage of time, self-mutilation, and renewed hopes for rebirth.

The origin of Father Time is either the Holly King who is the Celtic God of the dying year or Chronos who is the Greek God of Time.

Father Time and Baby New Year serve as metaphors for death of the calendar year and the birth of a new one. Baby New Year grows up into the old bearded Father Time by the end of 2011. He hands his duties over to the Baby New Year 2012. Baby New Year 2011 covers a lot of territory age wise in one year.

F a t h e r T i m e / A n g e l o f D e a t h

Because Father Time conveys death, he is seen in cemeteries as well. This particular one seen to the right is from Cimiterie Monumentale in Milan, Italy. Notice, Father Time/Angel of Death is an old bald man with an amazing set of wings. His scythe, as we have

seen above, conveys death. Notice that he is looking down towards the ground which conveys death on earth but we will have eternal life.

If you are ever in Milan, visit this cemetery because the grave monuments are works of art.



R o m a n G o d J a n u s

Like Father Time and Baby New Year, the Roman god Janus conveys the ending of one year and the beginning of another. This is conveyed with one god having two heads, one looking forward to the New Year and the other looking back at the old year.

In mythology, the gods are usually seen in both the Greek and Roman civilizations but Janus is seen alone in the Roman civilization.

Other connections to Janus include:

The word January because it is the first month of the year.

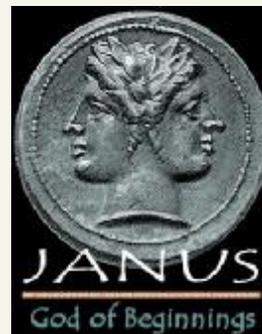
The word janitor because he is the custodian of the world.

God of the beginnings and the guardians of gates and doors.

Originally, one face was bearded and one face was clean shaven, most likely representing the sun and the

moon. In some sculptures, he is holding a key which conveys that he was worshipped at the beginning of planting time, harvest, marriages, births and other important beginnings in a person's life.

The Romans believed that you could ensure a good ending if you began endeavors with prayers to Janus. His principle temple in the Forum has doors facing east and west.



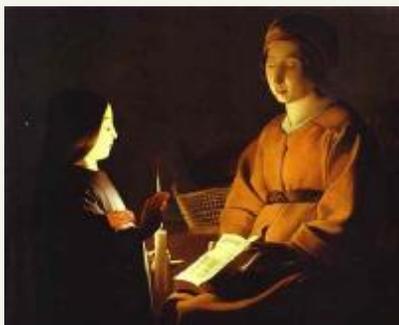
Janus was seen on coins and in Roman sculpture

“Life is not a brief candle. It is a splendid torch that I want to make burn as brightly as possible before handling it on to future generations.”

George Bernard Shaw

C a n d l e R e v i s i t e d

Candles are used in New Year's celebrations because the suggestion is that the smoke from the candles would rise and reach the heavens above. This ensures that God will answer our secret prayers sent on the flames of the candle. As seen by the painting to the right, we also believe that candles spread light, cheer and warmth around.



The Education of the Virgin, 1640, by Georges de la Tour

As we saw with the Advent candles in the last issue, they convey life, especially that of an individual, hope, learning, festivity, the eternal soul, charm against evil spirits, Christ as the light of the world and romance. A candlestick conveys the beauty of a ripe old age.

B o n f i r e s

Let us continue with the image of fire but on a much grander scale. Every culture uses bonfires to celebrate different important events in their lives. The idea is that bonfires immediately pull people around as New Year falls at the peak of winter in most countries. They convey

death, resurrection, fertility, warning, and victory.

In the United States, bonfires are usually held during summer breaks or at the end of high school or college homecoming rallies.

In Northern Italy, the celebration *Panevin* (in English

meaning bread and wine) or *Foghera* is usually held on Epiphany (January 6). A straw witch dressed with old clothes is placed on a bonfire and burned to ash. The witch conveys the past in this instance. We have visited witches in the past—see newsletter 28.



Every culture uses the symbolism of bonfires in different ways



San Michele Cemetery Island, Venice, Italy

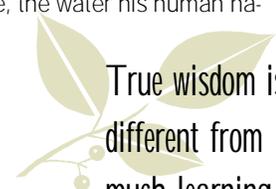
Researching for this newsletter, it was

G r a p e s

fun to see which symbols are used by Italy to celebrate the New Year. Grapes are used by Italians and connects to the popular saying "eat grapes on New Year's Day and you will be counting money the rest of the year."

Grapes convey fertility, sacrifice, the Eucharist (especially when shown with wheat or bread), the spiritual nature of love and wisdom, charity, intoxication, wine, fruitfulness, blood, the blood of Christ, and is an attribute of Bacchus.

Wine conveys blood, sacrifice, youth and eternal life, the spiritual nature of love and wisdom, the Eucharist, a spiritual drink intoxication, inspiration, wisdom, resurrection, lust, truth, violence, purification, gladness, rejoicing, revelry and attribute of Bacchus. Pouring out wine conveys blood letting in ritual sacrifice, napkin and cruse of wine conveys attribute of the Good Samaritan, and wine mixed with water at the Eucharist signifies Christ's divine nature, the water his human nature.



True wisdom is different from much learning. Much learning means little wisdom. (Tao Te Ching 81)

L e n t i l s

In Italy, eating lentils on New Year's Eve traditionally conveys the wish to earn more money next year, most likely because of their round coin-like shape.

Lentils convey humbleness and poor man's food. The plant that Lentils is produced from is likely from the Near East and has been part of the human diet since Neolithic times, being one of the first crops domesticated in the

Near East. Lentils are mentioned many times in the Old Testament, the first time recounting the incident in which Jacob purchases the birthright from Esau with stewed lentils. In Jewish mourning tradition, they are considered as food for mourners, together with boiled eggs. The reason is that their round shape conveys the life cycle from birth to death.



Illustration of the Lentil plant, 1885

P o m e g r a n a t e s

Also in Italy on New Year's Eve, Pomegranate fruit juice is served to guests because it is associated with fertility and abundance.

Pomegranates convey fecundity, royalty, Christ, autumn, womb, the female principle, emblem of the High Priest, sanctity, unity, concord, love, truth, frankness (usually shown

open), love, God's gifts, the Church, the return of spring, rejuvenation of the earth, sometimes the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, attribute of the Virgin Mary, and the personifications of Sufficiency and Victory.

Pomegranates in religious painting Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo Da Vinci with either

the Virgin Mary or the baby Jesus holding it. The fruit, broken open conveys the fullness of Jesus' suffering and resurrection. It is also sometimes connected to the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden.



Detail from *Madonna of the Pomegranate* by Sandro Botticelli, ca. 1487 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence).

**Do you have ideas for
future newsletters?**



**WATERHOUSE
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The mission of Waterhouse Symbolism is to research and document gravestone symbols nationally and internationally.



Aara and me at my book signing

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to 2011 and our new look. Let me know what you think. We have had the same format since April 1, 2008 so it was time for a change. Let me know if you have suggestions of future newsletters.

Take care,

Richard Waterhouse

How Mourning is Expressed

Cori Ander, one of my Waterhouse Symbolism newsletters' supporters, told me about a wonderful exhibition currently at the Anoka County Historical Society. If you want further information, go to: <http://ac-hs.org/inmemoriam2010.htm>

Cori explains eloquently that you may be seeing more of these memorials (look to the right) by artists as they struggle to get commissions in our current society. Cori says that it "reminds me of a common 1800's practice where artists were commissioned to draw/paint images of the departed. I think it is a hoot that ironically, the term used when an artist has the model/subject directly present (IE: up close and personal) is called "life drawing" even

when the subject is dead!! Anyway, as I am sure you already know, this practice (hiring an artist to capture the likeness of a loved one when an image was wanted as a memorial item), kept many artists in business and at times, was the only source of income for some. This of course, was prior to the use of photography to capture the like image."

At the Cahoon Museum of American Art, I am putting together an exhibition entitled "Celebration of Life: How the perception of death changes from the Victorian era to now." If you have suggestions of artists or artifacts to include, let me know. The exhibition will be during the Halloween season in Cape Cod so I am sure we will do some fun activities in relation to the exhibition. Let me know your ideas.



Vikor Lutheran Church Cemetery,
Kandiyohi County, MN