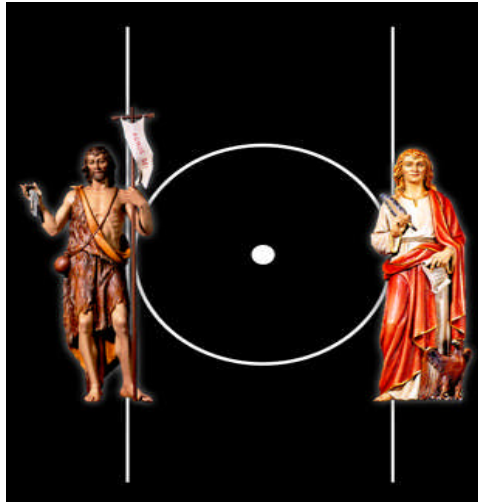


....From a Lodge of the Holy Saints John

By history and custom, as well as within our ritual, Freemasons hold in veneration the festival day of Saint John the Baptist on June 24th, and Saint John the Evangelist on December 27th. There is one line of thought that credits these dates as being related to the summer and winter solstices. Any Blue Lodge that forgets either of these important Festival Days forfeits a precious link with the past and loses an opportunity for the renewal of allegiance to everything in Freemasonry symbolized by our two Patron Saints.



It was common in the middle ages for craftsmen to place themselves under the protection of some saint of the church. If possible they would select one who bore a tie to their trade, such as St. Peter - the fishermen, St. Crispin for those who made gloves, and St Luke for Doctors.

This being the month of June I want to focus on John the Baptist. I was able to trace back to at least eleven medieval trade guilds that held John the Baptist as their patron. Even after years of exhaustive research by some very well known Masonic scholars, no one can say with any certainty why our fraternity adopted these two particular Saints. Regardless, Freemasons today agree that the choice of these two ancient brethren was, indeed, very wise. Surely no other teachers fit the mold of our gentle craft, or exemplify through their lives and works the sublime doctrine and ageless teachings of Freemasonry. The appropriateness of the Saints John is obvious in our system of moral teachings.

Saint John the Baptist was a stern and just man, he wouldn't stand for sham, pretense or weakness. He was a man of great inner strength and fire. He was courageous, humble, sincere and magnanimous. A character at times, but very heroic and of rugged nobility, Jesus says of him: "Among those that are born of woman, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptizer".

It is generally thought that he began his ministry in his late 20's, spreading the word of repentance to the people of Jerusalem. Many even wondered if he was the Messiah prophesied in the ancient Hebrew teachings. We are also told that John baptized Jesus after which he stepped

away and told his followers to follow Jesus. Oddly enough, according to the Bible, John and Jesus never met again.

John's ministry and life ended when he kept admonishing Herod and his wife for their sinful behavior...not a good move on his part! John was imprisoned for that tactical error, and eventually beheaded. It was written by Saint Jerome that Herod actually kept the head for a long time after, stabbing the tongue with a knife in a demented attempt to inflict even more punishment upon John.

In addition to being the initial patron Saint of Freemasons, the Baptist was also considered to be the Patron of the following; Bird merchants, cutters, furriers, and the Knights of Malta.

The first Grand Lodge organized in England in 1717 on the festival day of the Baptist. The United Grand Lodge of England was created in 1813 on the festival day of the Evangelist. The day of Saint John the Baptist is symbolic of a day of beginnings while the day of the Saint John the Evangelist is symbolic of endings.

In an early 18th century English catechism I found several questions and answers relating to the reasoning of why lodges were dedicated to the Holy Saints John. One of those was this:

Q - Why dedicated to John the Baptist?

A - In him, we have a singular instance of purity, zeal, simplicity of manners, and an ardent wish to benefit mankind by his example. To him we are indebted for the introduction of the grand tenet of our institution, which is our glory to support: Peace on earth, good will toward men.

Thus we define the two great characters to whom we owe the establishment of the great tenants of Craft, and the improvement of our system; while, in the ceremony of dedication, we commemorate the virtues and transmit them to the generations that follow.

John the Baptist was simply a man who lived in one particular historical moment. Yet, his message of repentance, humility, devotion to and love of God transcends time and culture. John's message of repentance was more than saying 'you're sorry'. The Greek word 'metanoia' from which the word repentance comes, literally means ...*to turn around*. John urged his followers to turn around and move in a new direction, towards God instead of running away from him. John wanted his followers to live lives that demonstrated their orientation in God's direction.

Early in our Masonic travels we were told that we were seeking admission to a lodge, erected to God and dedicated to the Holy Sts. John. Our ritual also specifically mentions '*a Lodge of the Holy Saints John at Jerusalem*'. Some Masons understand this to mean a physical lodge building located in Jerusalem, when it only refers to the Holy Saints John as being in Jerusalem. Hundreds of years ago, Scottish Lodges were referred to as Saint Johns' Lodges. So when a brother referred to himself as coming from a Lodge of the Holy Saints John at Jerusalem, he meant that he came from a Scottish Lodge.

We may never know the truth about John's historical relationship with Freemasonry. But in our time Freemasonry honors the humble man who came to be known as Saint John the Baptist because his entire life exemplified duty to God through his faith, his religious practices and through the very living of his life. Now isn't that what Masonry is supposed to be all about?

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From the writings of:
Mt. Wor. Carl H. Claudy
Bro. and Rev. Joseph Fort Newton
Bro. Bob Weed, Kingman Lodge 22, AZ, and
a ritual book dating from 1832 (Great Britain)