

THE HOLY SAINTS JOHN

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There are many in the Holy Scriptures by the name of John. The name John means "Jehovah's gift", and this may well apply to the two Saints John acknowledged as the patrons of Freemasonry - St. John the Baptist, wonderfully born of God, and St. John the Evangelist, or St. John the Divine, the beloved disciple of Our Blessed Lord. Both these Johns were related to each other and to Our Lord, and each had a definite part to play in one of the greatest events of history - the Incarnation of God's Son as the Messiah.

John the Baptist was born of aged and God-fearing parents - Zacharias and Elizabeth, his father being a faithful priest of the temple. His especial vocation in life was that of a herald or forerunner of the Messiah, the Light of the World. His method of preparation was by baptism of repentance, and so he is known as "John the Baptist". After the giving of his name in the temple, his father's tongue was loosed and he said "And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people for the remission of their sins through the tender mercy of Our God; whereby the day spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet to the way of peace". "And the child grew, and waxed in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel."

John the Evangelist, or John the Divine, the writer of the Fourth Gospel, three General Epistles, and the Book of Revelation, the youngest of the Apostles, was the son of Zebedee and the brother of James, partners in a fishing firm, and lived at Jerusalem. He was well educated, and readily responded to the challenge of Our Lord to follow Him. It was to him, "the beloved apostle", that our Lord committed the care of His mother from the cross. He was the missionary to the Greek world, and became Bishop or overseer of the Church at Ephesus. Later he was banished for his loyalty to the Christian teaching to the lonely island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, where he wrote the most Masonic, mysterious, and symbolic of all his works - the Revelation. He returned from exile to Ephesus when about 90, and in his old age, when he could say but little, he kept repeating "Little children, love one another". When he was asked why he was always saying this he replied "It is the commandment of the Lord, and if this is done it is enough."

John the Evangelist is the most interesting of the Apostles in personal charm, character, and teaching. Unlike Peter, he was firm and undaunted, and did not forsake his Master even at the cross.

As to the dates for these patron Saints of Masonry, 24 June for John the Baptist and 27 December for John the Evangelist, it has been suggested that they were taken over from pagan festivals having to do with the Spring solstice, the season of stronger light and the Winter solstice, the beginning of longer light. I am inclined to think that these dates belong to the Christian Church and were taken over by Masonry: 24 June is a fit and proper day to hold open-air services to commemorate St. John's life which was spent in the desert and the wilderness under the open canopy of Heaven, 27 December is placed near the birth of Christ, the great Light of the world, because St. John the Evangelist was nearest to Our Lord of all the Apostles, having reclined on his breast at the Last Supper, and is the Apostle of Light.

Now the connection of these two Saints John with Masonry is steeped in legend and tradition, accepted by some schools of thought and denied by others. It is a very ancient custom to dedicate a work, or writing, or institution to the memory of some outstanding person. We see this in the Book of Psalms called the "Psalms of David", although it is quite certain King David had nothing to do with their composition. Also in the Book of Acts of the Apostles the author addressed his work to a mystical person called Theophilus. Masonry being older than Christianity could have chosen other patrons such as Confucius or some of the Greek gods. Solomon was chosen later as a patron of Masonry. But why the holy Saints John of Jerusalem instead of Mohammed or other great religious and educational leaders of later dates or even other great men of the days of the Saints John? Upon a closer study of this great question we find that there are several periods of Masonic history each adopting its own patron.

First Period: From the building of King Solomon's Temple to the Babylonian captivity and its destruction (1000 B.C. to 581 B.C.), the patron of the Masonic Art was Solomon, a man of world-wide fame, wisdom, and beauty of architecture, as displayed in the most gorgeous building of all time, the first Temple at Jerusalem.

Second Period: From the return of the exiles from Babylon and the rebuilding of the second Temple (534 B.C.) at Jerusalem to its second destruction, under the Roman Emperor Vespasian (70 A.D.), the patron was Zerubbabel, who was the governor and overseer of the work of rebuilding.

Third Period: From 70 A.D. to 100 A.D., John the Baptist was the adopted patron. Masonry seems to have suffered a period of decay (although this fact is denied by some) and no Grand Master could be found to take charge of the Craft. Five or six men most outstanding in the Craft were picked out to find a suitable Grand Master. Legend relates that John the Evangelist was approached, who was now over 90 years of age, and Bishop of Ephesus, and that after a time he consented to act.

Fourth Period: From 100 A.D. to 1717, the patron of this period was John the Evangelist. This John the Evangelist completed what John the Baptist began. So the two run parallel, ever since known as the Holy Saints John of Jerusalem, constituting a mystical or imaginary Lodge of Perfection, the Mother Lodge of all Masonry.

Fifth Period: From 1717 to 1813, this continued when the first Grand Lodge was formed in England, 24 June 1717, John the Baptist's Day, until 1813 when the London Lodges united to adopt Solomon as their patron.

Sixth Period: From 1813 to the present, the custom has since changed to take Saint George as the patron Saint and services are held on the Wednesday following St. George's Day (April 23rd). St. Patrick is the patron Saint of Irish Masonry, and St. Andrew of Scottish. None of these three, as far as we know, had anything to do with Masonry.

Seventh Period: The American Lodges continue with the Holy Saints John as their patron Saints. The first degrees are almost universally known as St. John's Masonry. Anciently Masons were known as Sts. John's Brothers. Tradition says the Masonic lodges are placed East and West because St. John the Baptist started his work of preparing for the Light in the East and St. John the Evangelist carried it to the West. I think it more accurate to say that the East and West position of our lodges comes from King Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem.

Now all the foregoing is worthy of our careful study, but I am persuaded after much research into the matter that we are all on more solid ground and our reasons better founded for having the two Saints John as the patron Saints of Masonry, when we examine their lives and works and teaching. I think it more correct to say that Masonry has patronized the Saints John rather than the Saints John patronized Masonry. John the Evangelist is the most Masonic of all sacred writers in teaching and language. Light and truth are one and the same and are both summed up in

God's full revelation of the truth of all ages in His Beloved Son. The Word -that is the Divine wisdom, light and truth - became flesh. In the holy city described in the Book of the Revelation, no temple is needed there, "neither the sun or the moon, for Christ is the Light and the Glory thereof."

John the Baptist was the forerunner and herald of that Light - "that was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" - "He (John the Baptist) was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light." John the Baptist was a strong, heroic, courageous preacher of light, of truth and righteousness - one who boldly rebuked vice and suffered for the truth's sake. "He was a burning and a guiding light" and brought about a great awakening in preparation for the true Light of the World. Our Blessed Lord said of him and his work, "Among those born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist."

John the Evangelist is the great apostle of Light and Love. "God is truth; God is light; God is Love." In his first Epistle John writes, "This then is the message that we have heard of him and declare unto you - that God is light and in him no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."

Could any words be more Masonic than these?

Now the first object of the Masonic Craft is Light; the first principle, brotherly love. The Masonic Order is essentially Christian as it proceeds to unfold its hidden mysteries and looks to the sacred writings as its great light. Christ is the true Light of the whole world - not of any one part or race - not the only light that has illumined mankind but the only world light - The Bright Morning Star (language of St. John) to which all Masonry looks. So St. John the Evangelist is the patron Saint of all who receive the light as John the Baptist is of all who seek it, who himself pointed to the true Light of the World from his heart.