



## THE HOLY SAINTS JOHN

(An Oration by Dr. Bing Johnson, 32°, KCCH  
presented at the November 20, 2006 Meeting of the  
Grand Junction Consistory)

St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist have been the patron saints of Masonry for hundreds of years and are revered and celebrated as role models. The two men were quite different. John the Baptist was the stern prophet while John the Evangelist was a teacher of love. We are all dedicated to principles for which these great men stood for.

Lodges in the United States, England, Ireland and Scotland are erected to God and dedicated to the Holy Sts. John. We are reminded of that each time in the opening and closing of Lodge when the Master will say "In the name of God and the Holy Saints John."

In the Scandinavian Rite the three craft degrees are conferred in St. John's Lodges (those from the fourth to the sixth in the St. Andrew's Lodges).

Their feast days were almost always celebrated by lodges during the operative, transitional and speculative periods that lasted from the 14th through the 19th centuries. During the 18th and much of the 19th centuries the two Sts. John's feast days were always occasions of great celebration by the Craft. The brethren would assemble, put on their regalia and form a parade that would proceed to a public divine worship service. Following the church service they would go back to their meeting place and there convene a tiled meeting, around a sumptuous dinner, were they would transact business. This practice generally ceased in America in the 1830's. In England the annual installation is referred to as the "Festival of Sts. John" and at one time unattached brethren were known as St. John Masons.

The new Mason first becomes aware of the Saints briefly in the first degree lecture when he is told about the point within a circle, the two perpendicular parallel lines and the Book of Holy Scriptures. The two living lines of Brethren at the altar are representative of the two Sts. John; the line at the South represents St. John the Baptist and the one on the North St. John the Evangelist. St. John the Baptist represents a new beginning just as the initiation into Freemasonry does, so it could be said that St. John the Baptist is a symbolic of initiation.

St. John the Baptist was the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth. Instead of becoming a Priest, as his father was, he went into the wilderness to live a life of meditation in preparation for his ministry. While in the wilderness he communed with God, meditated and received the message that he would deliver to the people.

It is assumed that he went into the wilderness near the time of the death of his parents and that he was a Nazirite and that he had taken the Nazirite Vow. The vow is lengthy and contains three distinct restrictions: (1) the Nazirite must abstain from wine and fermented drink, (2) a Nazirite's hair could not be cut and the beard could not be shaved, (3) touching a dead body was prohibited. The purpose of the Nazirite Vow was to raise up a group of leaders devoted completely to God.

The name John means "Jehovah has been gracious". In addition St. John the Baptist also symbolizes the awaking of our Moral Nature.

John emerged from the wilderness and began to deliver his message. He wore a camel hair cloak and a leather girdle. He preached with zeal and a passion that gathered many followers and a religious revival resulted from his efforts.

After he baptized Jesus, he continued to preach and baptize. The stern integrity of St. John the Baptist, which caused him to forgo every consideration in discharging his obligations to

God; the unshaken firmness with which he met martyrdom rather than betray his duty to his Master; steady reproof of vice, and continued preaching of repentance and virtue make him a fit patron of Masonry. The best summary of St. John the Baptist's purpose and significance is found in the first chapter of the gospel of St. John the Evangelist.

St. John the Evangelist, also known as St. John the Divine or John of Ephesus and John the Apostle, was a different kind of man than St. John the Baptist. It is thought that where he left off, St. John the Evangelist picked up and carried on.

John the Evangelist lived a life of complete devotion to Jesus as a person and as the Son of God, who's Gospel of Salvation he dedicated his life to spreading.

John the Evangelist, also called the Apostle of Love, was the last son of Zebedee and Salome, his brother was James, the Apostle. John, who appears to be the disciple that Jesus loved most, is thought to have been a disciple of John the Baptist. He witnessed the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. John and Andrew left John the Baptist and followed Jesus.

This began the discipleship which continued throughout the rest of his life. John along with Peter, Andrew and James became the earliest disciples. Jesus called the brothers James and John, "Boanerges" which means "sons of thunder" indicating they had a quick temper and a fiery zeal.

Bro. Albert Mackey says this about St. John the Evangelist: "His constant admonition, in the Epistles, to the cultivation of Brotherly Love and the mystical nature of his Apocalyptic visions, have been, perhaps the principle reason for the veneration paid to him by the Craft." In addition to that he suggests that righteousness will be eventually prevail over evil, and that love will triumph over hatred. Through his dedication he shows the way to personal victory over evil, and is rightly regarded by Masons as one of their Patron Saints.

Whatever the religious faith of a Mason might be, the symbolism of the two Sts. John, as the patron saints of Freemasonry, represents the covenant every Mason has with his Lodge and with his brother. St. John the Baptist represents the type of moral purity we should strive to attain, and St. John the Evangelist represents the brotherly love and affection we should all entertain toward each other. Together they symbolize the belief and faith that is necessary.

There are a number of ideas as to how the association of the Sts. John with Masonry came about, many of which are not plausible. One suggested reason is that the Feast dates of June 24th and Dec 27th marked the summer and winter solstices which hint at a connection with ancient customs. Another theory is that Robert the Bruce revived the Masonic Fraternity at the Battle of Bannockburn, fought on St. John the Baptist's day. To be completely disavowed is the proposition that the two saints were members of the Craft. The premier Grand Lodge of England was constituted on St. John the Baptist's Day in 1717.

#### SOURCES:

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