



AnnoLucis A.L In the Year of Light

When the secretary reads the minutes, or on any formal Mason document, or if you look at a Masonic cornerstone, there are two dates. The first date is easy to recognize. It is what we all have come to know as the current date, commonly referred to as A.D., in latin meaning “the year of our Lord”, Anno Domini. The other year is four thousand years in advance followed by A.L., in latin that stands for Anno Lucis, which means “in the year of Light”. This date is used for Masonic dating, or more commonly today referred to as, the Masonic Calendar.

For a Mason, this reference, symbolically may make sense, but how did it come to be? Well let’s go a little deeper into this mostly forgotten bit of Masonic history.

Anno Lucis, or “in the year of Light”, symbolically represents the moment in creation when light came into the world. The very first sentence in the Bible, Genesis 1:1 to 1:3, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit of God moved across the face of the waters, and God said ‘Let there be light’, and there was light.” In the early days of the Grand Lodge of England, they started using Anno Lucis to date their documents and in time became known as “the year of Masonry”. How then did they know when precisely the world began and God created light? For the Bible told them so...

In the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, it was common knowledge in the English speaking world that God created it on the nightfall of October twenty-second, 4004 B.C. They knew this because it was printed in the Bible! The two men most responsible for this Biblical printing were James Ussher, Archbishop of Ireland, and publisher Thomas Guy.

James Ussher (1581-1656), was a very highly regarded scholar and author of many books from the early to mid Seventeenth century. He had a remarkable gift of languages, speaking five, as well as, representing the best of scholarship at the time. He had taken upon himself the task of integrating and combining all of history in a chronological order.

Ussher, born in Dublin, Ireland in 1581, was ordained into the Anglian Church in 1601, and later in 1625 appointed Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of all of Ireland. He was to use the history of the Jews, Persians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, and the Romans. He had no information on the history of China. His goal was to write a world history, covering every major event from creation to 70 A.D., the destruction of the Second Temple, using the Bible as his framework. Ussher, and most of society believed the Bible to be the only reliable source of chronological information. He analyzed how ancient calendars were calculated, and using their planetary observation tables.

He was not alone in trying to calculate a timeline. Isaac Newton, Martin Luther, and others tried as well. It became a very popular study for the scholastic community at that time. Ussher calculated that the world began in 4004 B.C., Noah's flood in 2948 B.C., Solomon died in 975 B.C., and the Second Temple destroyed in 70 A.D.

It may be hard to imagine now, but at that time, when people saw dates in the Bible in black and white they were God's own truth. Ussher died in 1656 however, before the English version of his book with its time table was published. So how did this all come to be?

The inclusion of his dates in the Bible have very little to do with theology however, or chronological accuracy, but more to do with marketing.

Thomas Guy was a London publisher and book seller. In 1675, he began printing the King James Bible. Other printers were doing the same and he needed something to set his printing apart. He started including Ussher's dates in the margins, alongside the corresponding scripture text. In time, these dates would be generally accepted across society because the King James Bible was the most published and used in English speaking nations.

In 1701 the Church of England adopted Ussher's dates and so did early Masonry. In 1721, theologian and Mason, Dr. James Anderson was commissioned to write the history of the Freemasons. He may have exaggerated a bit when he created

his mythological timeline of the craft, beginning with Adam and up to 1723, but he used Ussher's times in his book. He states that the beginning of Creation was 4004 B.C. and the beginning of Light, Masonry.

Because Anderson collected, captured, and preserved much of the Masonic symbolism and lore in which so much of the craft is anchored, the concept of the Masonic era, the date of first Light, 4004 B.C., was adopted as the origin of the Craft. Over time, Ussher's date of 4004 was changed to 4000, just to make it easier.

Free Masonry has continued to use Anno Lucis, A.L. on cornerstones, documents, and in minute books, a loving tribute and part of the mystic tie that binds us with our ancient Brothers so long ago.

This very short synopsis I have made was taken from the January 2021 edition of the Knight Templar Magazine. The article was authored by Sir Knight Tom Hendrickson P.G.M of the Minnesota Grand Commandery. I would recommend the full reading to anyone.