

# “FIRE AND WATER”

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December 27, 2006

“...erected to God and dedicated to the Holy Saints John” are familiar words to each member of the craft here tonight. The Holy Saints John are, as we know, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist adopted by Freemasons as our patron saints several centuries ago. Prior to 1440 when we began to be known as Freemasons we were recognized as “Joannite Brothers” (John’s Brethren) or the Fraternity of St. John. There is however, a third St. John in Freemasonry, St. John the Almoner to whom the Order of the Knights Hospitalers was originally dedicated.

Our celebration tonight, St. John the Evangelist’s Festival Day, probably did not begin the way you think. Thomas Paine wrote in his book, “Origins of Freemasonry”, “The high festival of the Masons is on the day they call St. John’s Day, but every enlightened Mason must know that holding their festival on this day has no reference to the person called St. John, the holding of their festival on this day refers to a cause totally unconnected with either of the Saints John.”

Many of our most knowledgeable scholars believe the real explanation of Freemasonry’s connection with the Holy Saints John Festival Days is not found on the history of the craft, but rather in the history of ancient religions. These festival days are as old as the ancient systems of worship of fire and sun. The greatest manifestation of nature known to our ancient ancestors was the sun. It’s near kin, fire, replaced the sun during the night.

Sun worship and fire worship were natural for men. Early man noticed the longest days were mid-summer and this became a time of festival as did the Winter Solstice to celebrate the end of the slow decline of the sun.

We know now that the seasons of the year are caused by the 23.5 degree tilt of the earth’s axis. During half the year the southern hemisphere is closer to the sun than is the northern hemisphere. During the rest of the year the reverse is true. In the Northern Hemisphere the sun appears high in the sky during summer and low in the sky during winter. The two extreme examples are referred to as a solstice. The lowest elevation occurs December 21<sup>st</sup> and is the Winter Solstice, the first day of winter when nighttime hours (darkness) are at a maximum and the period of sunlight at a minimum.

From ancient Egypt through the Roman times pagan festivals were celebrated beginning on the Winter Solstice and continuing through the 27<sup>th</sup> of December. The church being unable to replace these pagan holidays and celebrations decided to adopt and incorporate them into their own system. It however took centuries for the traditions of St John’s, Days and Christmas to catch on.

The selection of December 25<sup>th</sup> as a Christian holiday was first recorded in scholarly text in 325 A.D. although the first actual practice was decreed by the Emperor Aurelian in 274 A.D. The Summer Solstice became known as the Festival of St. John the Baptist and the Winter Solstice that of St. John the Evangelist.

John the Baptist was born six months prior to Jesus’ birth so tradition set his birthday as June 24<sup>th</sup>. Legend has set the Evangelist’s birthday as December 27<sup>th</sup> hence our celebration on this day.

St. John the Evangelist apparently came into our Fraternal system near the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest authentic lodge records reference St. John the Evangelist in Edinborough in 1599 although mentions were made as early as 1430 in Cologne. “St. John’s Masonry” is a distinctive term for Scotch Lodges.

The Theological Values of Faith, Hope, and Charity regularly represented as the top three rungs of Jacob's ladder in Christian art are mentioned in our catechisms. John the Baptist is represented by Faith, John the evangelist by Hope and John the Almoner by Charity.

Commonly referred to in duality, the truth is that these men were opposites. They balance each other in the Masonic year and in many other aspects. John the Baptist was an extrovert and man of action while the Evangelist was an introvert, a man of thought and vision. They symbolize the perfect balance of darkness and light, life and death, passion and constraint, will and emotion, winter and summer. Using the symbols associated with Alchemy, which is generally considered an early part of Freemasonry, Saint John the Baptist can be viewed as the pyramid pointing up symbolizing fire that is the drive and will of action. Saint John the Evangelist may be viewed as the inverted pyramid or the symbol for water, representing spiritual and emotional love. Together both represent the interlocked star of Solomon, or the Square and Compass.

John the Evangelist was the son of Zebedee and brother of St. James the Great who together were known as the "Sons of thunder". John the Evangelist was a Galilean and the cousin of Jesus. Early in life he was impulsive, impetuous, and vindictive but in his later years his disposition mellowed and he became known as the Disciple of Love or in our terms "Brotherly Love". Today St. John the Evangelist is recognized the world over as the bringer of comfort to the grief stricken, courage to the meek, and strength for the fallen.

St. John the Evangelist teaches us to subdue our passions, one of the first lessons taught in Freemasonry.

When examining the writings of St. John the Evangelist a transformation is evident. The Evangelist goes from being a hot tempered young radical to one who exhibits and exemplifies peace in his old age.

We know he wrote one Gospel and three epistles. Those of you who are members of the Eastern Star may find it interesting that his epistles were written to an "Elect Lady" who later became Electa in Eastern Star Ritual. Many Masonic scholars hold the Gospel of St. John of vital importance to all Freemasons, not for its Christian Theology, but for the lessons of brotherly love contained therein.

He went from being intolerant of others to sharing his theology of a "better way of life" with all that will listen. Above all, John the Evangelist was loyal. He was the only Disciple to attend the trial of Jesus as well as being at the foot of the cross for crucifixion. Upon hearing of the empty tomb on that eventful Sunday morning he was the first Disciple to arrive. Moreover, it was John the Evangelist who took Mary, mother of Jesus, into his home and cared for her until her death.

From his writings we know his message was simple and straight forward, to know and love God is to obey His law. The essential mark of grace is brotherly love and the ideal life is to live in fellowship with others.

It matters not that a Lodge of The Holy Saints John at Jerusalem never existed or that neither John the Baptist nor John the Evangelists were members of the Fraternity. They have been selected as our patron saints because they exemplify the basic principles of our ancient fraternity in daily lives, through their words and deeds. It is because Freemasonry regards the character and internal qualifications of a man that the two Saints John are fitting patrons. We as Freemasons honor them because they were living examples of the practice of love for their fellow man and love of their creator.

St. John the Evangelist's Festival Day –December 27<sup>th</sup> , Phil Elam 32 degree –2002

St. John the Evangelist, Patron Saint, Phil Elam, Grand Orator 1999-2000

“and dedicated to the Holy Saints John”, Worshipful Brother Harvey L. Ward, Jr., PM

St. John the Baptist Day, Duality in One. June 24, interpretation of a work, Ken Kolchier

NOTE:

Brethren” The article above was prepared and delivered by Wor/Bro. Kevin Ennis at our St. John's Evangelist Day Observance on Dec. 27 2006. We felt that it should be shared with all of our members.

Thank you Wor/Bro. Kevin for a fine program.