

Masonic Minutes – December One

The Holy Saints' John (Who Are These Guys?)

“The Holy Saints' John” refers to Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist who are said to be the Patron Saints of our Fraternity. This begs the question, “Why are they so prominent in our ritual and degree work? And why, aside from all other Saints, is Masonry led to the Holy Saints John as our patrons?”

St. John the Baptist is the more prominent of the two Saints in the Holy Gospels. St. John the Baptist is described as the cousin of Jesus and a faithful aid in leading the way for his work among men. In the Book of Luke he is referred to as the greatest of men born of a woman; high praise from the Gospels to be sure. We associate St. John the Baptist as the minister who baptized believers in the waters of the Jordan River. His message was that of devotion through a life of strict observance to righteousness and moral character. He was firm, dogmatic and relentless in his belief, dedication and ministry. His fervent ministry drew the wrath of King Herod. St. John the Baptist refused to renounce his following of or belief in his cousin Jesus and for that the King had him imprisoned and later beheaded. This example of allegiance and commitment to his sacred trust elevates him as one who merits our esteem. He is certainly the image of morality and commitment that Masons would want to find in their patron Saint.

Saint John the Apostle or Evangelist (considered by many to be one and the same) has a more obscure history. Numerous sources cite the persona of the Evangelist as the likely combination of several biblical persons assimilated over the millennia for emphasis and clarity. Much of the writing attributed to the Evangelist echoes Masonic themes, phrases and even ritual, however history falls short of being able to tell us whether the writings of the Evangelist are the actual source of our ritual. Regardless of the lack of traceable history, it seems reasonable to conclude that those intimately familiar with the Evangelist and his writings find him to be the “sensible” patron Saint of the fraternity. Writings such as those in the Book of Revelations, the Gospel of John along with the Epistles of John display a more ideological or philosophical perspective, often hinting at the deeper meaning of a person or event.

The adoption of both Saints' John to equally represent the fraternity seems to further distinguish Masonry at its core. The methods of religious practice for these two Saints are very different yet both are fully committed to the same belief. St. John the Baptist is strict and literal while St. John the Evangelist is lofty, philosophical and esoteric; a perfect “yin and yang” example. As the Patron Saints they serve as an example of the balance and harmony men can achieve in Freemasonry.

The Grand Lodge of England was formed on June 24, 1717, on the feast day of St. John the Baptist which corresponds closely with the summer solstice and ancient celebrations marking the longest day of the year. It is most fitting to begin a light-seeking Grand Lodge during one of the longest days of light. The observance of the feast of St John the Evangelist is held on December 27th just after the winter solstice. This is the time that the world begins moving from darkness to greater light, and it became one of the more important days in the Masonic calendar. It was reported that George Washington refused to miss attending the Masonic observance of St. John the Evangelist. Regardless of how or where it began, it is accepted that every regular and well-governed Lodge recognize and celebrate both days as a remembrance and recognition of our patron Saints. Typically celebrated with feasts, processions and regalia, the Holy Saints John are metaphoric pillars of our Lodge, for Saint John the Baptist is implied as the pillar beneath the earth and Saint John the Evangelist as the pillar beneath the heavens. They are our history and our legacy; they are our obligation to forever remember, explore and celebrate the boundaries of our faith.