

## **... AND DEDICATED TO THE HOLY SAINTS JOHN**

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As Freemasons, we know that our Blue Lodges are “*Erected to God and dedicated to the Holy Saints John.*” We celebrate the feast days of these two saints around the solstices – that is St. John the Baptist at the time of the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, and St. John the Evangelist at the time of the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year.

The Holy Saints John are referenced in the Entered Apprentice Lecture as representing perfect parallels in Masonry, but generally, we seldom hear more about the “Holy Saints John,” and so it is fair to ask who these men were, and why they are so important to us as Freemasons?

St. John the Baptist, the original Patron Saint of Masons, was a prophet of righteousness who rebuked kings, and preached repentance and virtue. He embraced martyrdom rather than betray his trust – which is truly characteristic of the teachings of Masonry. His life is depicted in the three synoptic Gospels (Mathew, Mark, and Luke) as well as the Book of John. He was born six months before the birth of Jesus to St. Elizabeth and St. Zachary, a religious family. In his early youthful ministry, he became known by his oft-repeated theme, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

In the course of John the Baptist's preaching during the 15th year of the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberias Caesar, John denounced and upbraided Herod Antipas, the Governor of Galilee for violating Jewish law by taking Herodias, the wife of his half brother Phillip, as his own wife. Herodias and her 14 year-old daughter, Salome, who was also the niece of Herod, plotted to get rid of John, and asked that he be decapitated as a reward for Salome's dancing.

John left his mark as a holy man of great principal. The Jewish historian Josephus said of him: *"He was indeed a man imbued with all virtue, who exhorted the Jews to the practice of justice towards men and piety towards God...."*

St. John the Evangelist was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and the brother of James the Greater. The two sons were originally fisherman and returned to that calling in later life. He lived near Ephesus most of his life and died there of old age. Tradition has it that John the Evangelist was one of the original twelve apostles.

John the Evangelist is famous for his doctrine of love, which comes into sharp focus in the following words found in the 15th Chapter of the Book of John:

12. This is my commandment, that Ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
17. These things I command you, that ye love one another.

Few Masons seem to have arrived at a satisfactory explanation for why these two Saints were selected. For example, since Masons were and are builders, it was unclear why St. Thomas, the popular patron of architecture and building was not selected

Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia sheds some light on the subject under the entry: "***The Holy Saints John; Lodge of St. John at Jerusalem.***

*The Gothic Legends related back to the building of King Solomon's Temple, approximately 1000 years before there was a St. John but, nevertheless, the first legendary Lodge was said to be that of St. John, presumably meaning a Lodge at Jerusalem dedicated to St. John the Baptist. That St. John was the energetic forerunner of Christ and baptized Him in the River Jordan. In some places John the Evangelist, also called the Mystic, was deemed more to be revered, and was substituted. In other places, or most places, it was not known which was right, and it was not known why there should be any necessity for a choice, so that both were adopted as the Patron Saints and Lodges came to be dedicated to the Holy Saints John and were supposed to be replicas of some Lodge of the Holy Saints John at Jerusalem."*

Despite a lack of agreement as to why, when, and how they were selected, most Masons seem to agree that these two men were wisely selected to be the patrons of Freemasonry. In fact, these two Saints, selected by operative Masons centuries ago, survived the transition from Operative to Speculative Freemasonry, and continue as the patron saints to which our present day Lodges are dedicated.

Indeed, it does seem fitting and proper that our Freemasonry should honor these two great Saints, John the Baptist, a stern prophet of righteousness and a hearty son of the desert, and John the Evangelist the gentle prophet of Love. Taken together the two Saints John epitomize righteousness and love, the two tenets which point out the entire duty of man and Mason.