



Tonight, Masonic Lodges all across our world will observe the festival of one of the patron saints of Freemasonry. Now, if you were going to pick a patron saint for Masonry, who would you think would be the first choice? Surely, most of us would think it would be St. Thomas. After all, he is the patron saint of stone masons. But, that is not at all who was chosen. Instead, our ritual reveals.

As an Entered apprentice, whence came ye? From a lodge of the Holy Saints John. We say, "Erected to God and dedicated to the Holy Saints John." - These are familiar words known to every Freemason.

And, the Holy Saints John are, as we know, St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist.

And, each year, we meet twice on the festival of St. John. Once for the Baptist and once for the Evangelist. John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus, so tradition has set his feast day on June 24. Legend says that John the Evangelists birthday is December 27th, so we meet tonight.

Have you thought of how different the Holy Saints John are from each other? About the only thing they have in similarity is their name and their devotion to God.

John the Baptist was very extroverted.
John the Evangelist was very introverted.
John the Baptist was a man of action.
John the Evangelist was a man of thought.
They were very different.

But, tonight, we remember John the Evangelist. He was a Galilean. His father was Zebedee, a successful business fisherman of Bethsaida on the Sea of Galilee. His mother was Salome. His brother was James.

It may be inferred that Salome was a sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, making John and James cousins of Jesus. John had doubtless known Jesus most of his life.

Tradition informs us that in many cases the Altar Bibles of our Ancient Brethren were opened to the Gospel of Saint John so that Chapter 1, Verse 1 would be visible during the various proceedings.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."

It reads almost like Masonic ritual doesn't it? Nowhere else in the Bible since the beginning of Genesis familiar to all Freemasons is the concept of light so inextricably entwined with the idea of the divine spirit. As we progress through the degrees the concept of the Word, the Light, and the Divine as inseparable parts of the whole become of primary importance.

Albert Mackey says John the Evangelist is so important to Freemasons because in his epistles, he constantly admonishes us to have brotherly love and in the book of Revelation, the mystical nature of his Apocalyptic visions earns him veneration by the Craft.

Of course there are astrological reasons as well. The Sun enters Cancer about the time of the feast day of St. John the Baptist. In the winter, the Sun reaches Capricorn about the time of St. John the Evangelist's feast day. So, our town feasts of St. John happen when the sun is at its lowest and highest peaks in the yearly cycle, showing the meridian height of the sun in the south and the lowest point of darkness in the north, the shortest and longest days of the year.

John came from a prosperous family. They likely had hired servants and were influential in the official circles in Jerusalem.

He had been a follower of John the Baptist before becoming a follower of Jesus. He was one of the first two disciples that were called by Jesus. John was part of the inner circle of Jesus. He got to see some things that others did not see - like the raising of Jairus' daughter, the Transfiguration of Jesus, and the grief of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. He was called "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

John was there when Jesus performed the miracle of turning water into wine in Cana. He suffered with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and sat at His right hand during the last Supper.

But when he was a young man, he was impulsive, impetuous, and vindictive. Do you remember when he wanted to call down fire from Heaven? Jesus called John a "Son of Thunder."

But we don't remember him that way, do we? He learned to subdue his passions and in his later years, his disposition mellowed.

John's gospel is the basis of our chronology of the life of Jesus. We gather from John's gospel that Jesus ministered for 3 ½ years. John evidently had Luke's gospel in front of him when he wrote because what Luke put in John left out and what Luke left out, John put in. John is the one that Jesus entrusted His mother to, upon His death.

John knew his Bible. In his apocalyptic book of Revelation, he references the Old Testament 285 times. John must have particularly loved the book of Genesis because his book of Revelation is so closely related to Genesis. Three chapters from the beginning of Genesis, we meet the serpent for the first time. Three chapters from the end of the book of Revelation, we meet the serpent for the last time. There are at least 2 dozen other comparisons and contrasts involving Genesis and Revelation.

Just think of all that John the Evangelist saw in his life. Enormous changes took place. In John's lifetime, the Son of God had become the Son of Man. He had been betrayed, falsely accused, manhandled, mauled, and crucified. He had been buried, but risen in triumph from the tomb. He had ascended into heaven.

All these memories lingered in John's heart the rest of his life. John was Jesus' human cousin but for some three and a half years he'd been his best friend. He saw a new entity arise on earth, the Christian Church. He was a charter member. He had seen the church grow from 120 to 3,000 in a single day. These experiences changed John. Today, we don't know him as one of the "Sons of Thunder." We know him, how? As the Disciple of Love. Or, as we say in Masonic terminology, "Brotherly love."

John the Evangelist is so important to Masonry because of the lessons of Brotherly love that are contained in his Gospel and his epistles. And, even in the Eastern Star, it is one of the Epistles of John, addressed to the "Elect Lady" that later became Electa in our Eastern Star Ritual.

In John's writings, he teaches us to subdue our passions, one of the first lessons every new Mason learns in lodge. And, when you examine the life of St. John the Evangelist, you see just that kind of major transformation. He goes from being the hot tempered young radical to one who exhibits peace in his old age. He goes from being intolerant of others to working with others. And, his very life represents loyalty. He was the only disciple to attend the trial of Jesus. He was also the only one at the foot of the cross for the crucifixion. When he heard about the empty tomb, he was the first Disciple to arrive. And it was John who took Mary, the mother of Jesus, into his home and cared for her until her death.

Think about this for just a moment. John the Evangelist represents every individual initiate. John is initiated by John the Baptist into the mysteries and like the entered apprentice is giving a white apron to represent a new sense of purity. John then travels with his Master and is indoctrinated in the parables of truth, similar to the Fellow Craft traveling being indoctrinated with the spiral staircase leading to truth. Then, similar to the Master Mason, John is witness to the death and resurrection of his Master. - food for thought.

The message of John is very straightforward - to know and love God is to obey His law. That the essential mark of grace is brotherly love and that the ideal life is to live in fellowship with others.

It is the man alone, divested of all the outward recommendations of rank, state, or riches, that Masonry accepts, and it is his spiritual and moral worth alone which can open for him the door of the Masonic Temple. This is why, I believe, that St. John the Evangelist is a fitting patron. His living example of the Golden Rule, his practice of love for his fellow man, and his love for the Creator.

So, it is with a sense of pride that when asked from whence I came, I answer, "From a lodge of the Holy Saints John."