

# Christmas and Freemasonry - The Holy Saints John

by Greg Stewart

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At its surface, the Christmas holiday has no intrinsic connection to the fraternity of Freemasonry. What I mean by that is no where in the degrees does it link itself to any particular holiday in its practice, in particular the Christmas holiday season. There are, however, certain celebrations that have become a part of the fraternity which are linked to one of the interesting symbols that resides at the heart of the practice. Without any specific reference, Masons are said to come from a Lodge of the Holy Saints John, the specific why and how of this connection is lost in the sands of metaphorical time, but some connection infers a balance to the celestial equinox (from summer to winter and back again).

Through this link, winter is said to be represented by the Saint John the Evangelist, whose feast day falls on December 27th. This Holy Saint John has an interesting symbolic significance, in that, as John the Baptist (who represents the other Holy Saint John) was the precursor to the coming Christ, John the Evangelist is said to be the first disciple at the Lake of Genesareth who recognized the Christ and believe that he had risen. Of the Saint it is also said that he was the only disciple of Christ to not to forsake him in the hour of His Passion at the foot of the cross. John the Evangelist solstice is also called the Apostle of Charity, which may be in part, his connection to Freemasonry in addition to his unwavering resolve and purity of his love of the divine.

In creating the original construct of the two Johns, the conclusion that I came to was that they struck a balance between zeal and knowledge, the Baptist who was the precursor of the Christ living in his zeal for the coming son of God and the Evangelist as the representation of knowing that the Christ was the son of God. Only in piecing the component of knowing did it become clear to me that it was not about the degree of knowledge gained, but the degree to which the Evangelist trusted his intuition, to know what was before him. An interesting parallel comes in the book of Matthew where this very lesson is communicated to Peter from the Christ who says in Matthew 16:15-17

*"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."*

This is somewhat out of original context, but illustrative of revealed knowledge based on experience, on learning. John the Evangelist came to that knowledge by his experience with the Christ. Another way of looking at this experience is coming from darkness to light, an awakening, and if you take it further, the dawning of awareness. This awareness sits squarely with the idea of Sol Invictus, or the conquering sun which overcomes its captivity of night from the summer solstice and again begins to vanquish the night in its ever increasing minutes of daylight.

Looking at some of the other symbolic connections, the Evangelist is said to relate to the alchemical symbol of the up pointed triangle which represents fire, where again we can see a link to light and knowledge. When we combine the alchemical sign of the Baptist with that of the Evangelist, we create the star of Solomon, and the duality of fire and water, further, the duality of light and dark and summer and winter.

Further work attributed to John the Evangelist are the Epistles of John, and the book of Revelation, though his connection to them in later centuries has been contentious, as much of his life from 2000 years ago is lost to time. Within the church his feast day is first mentioned in the Sacramentary of Pope Adrian I near 772 A.D. The message of the church, and something each of us can take away from John the Evangelist is to "Apply thyself, therefore, to purity of heart, and thou shalt be like Saint John, a beloved disciple of Jesus, and shalt be filled with heavenly wisdom."

The feast of the Evangelist is little remembered today, except within Masonry where it is celebrated by a few lodges that still practice the Table Lodge ritual where brothers gather together to celebrate it with toasts to those brothers present and absent. In the past, it was considered a feast day of high importance for Freemasonry because of its proximity to the holidays and the presence of lodge members being close to home. Because of this, it gave those brothers a festival to meet under to punctuate the closing of the year. Meeting

like this though is something less convenient in this modern day as most with families travels abroad to celebrate the holiday.

Because it is celebrated less does not diminish the importance of the day, nor the symbol itself, as in the modern ritual we are reminded that we come from the Holy Saint John's in Jerusalem, and as such we should pause and reflect on just what that means. John the Evangelist gives us an important lesson to pursue knowledge and wake from the darkness and renew our commitment to the awakening light of the Victorious Sun. Even taken out the Christian metaphor, we can salute with Sol Invictus, as knowledge is re-awakened from its cold wintry defeat.

Through the lens of symbolism, John the Evangelist gives us a means to find resonance with the holiday of giving and compassion to the fraternity of brotherly love, relief, and truth.

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