

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

ST. JOHN, THE BAPTIST

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Early in our Masonic travels, we were told that we were seeking admission to a lodge, erected to God, and dedicated to the Holy Saints John. God, we know, for we had to state that we believed in God to be considered for membership. Who are these Saints John? Why were they considered to be appropriate models for us? Why do we have two days on which we recognize and remember them.

Today we will discuss just our first St. John, the Baptist, various religions group and fraternal organizations, such as Freemasonry recognize, him every June 24th.

As we turn to our Rule and Guide, we find that John the Baptist is verified by John the Evangelist. In the Gospel of John, 1:6, we find these words: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe." John was to tell of the Light to come.

In Luke 1:5, we find an account of an angel telling his parents, Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were both righteous before God. That is, they found favor with God in the performance of their priestly duties. The angel told Zacharias that his prayer was heard and would be answered--he would have a son, and his name would be John.

He was also told, "Many shall rejoice. He shall not drink strong wine, and he will make ready a people for the coming Messiah." He would also assume the vows of a Nazirite for life, which was very unusual because normally the vow was taken on for short periods (e.g., days, weeks, or months). Only three people, according to scripture, took the vows for life: Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist. This vow simply stated, "you would serve God with your entire being."

As a Jewish male, there were two very important days within the lifetime. The first was on the eighth day when the parents presented the male child to the priests for circumcision. At this point the parents accepted the responsibility to rear the child according to the law (Lev 10:11, Deut, 4:10, Deut. 6:7, Deut. 11:19). At twelve years of age, the second important day, the child is again presented to the priests, and becomes an adult, now numbered in the census.

When presented to the priests on the eighth day, Zacharias probably offered the prayer, or its equivalent: "Vouchsafe Thine aid, Almighty Father of the Universe, to this our present convention; and grant that this candidate for Masonry may dedicate and devote his life to Thy service and become a true and faithful Brother among us. Endue him with a competency of Thy divine wisdom, that by the influence of the pure principles of our Fraternity he may be better enabled to display the beauties of holiness, to the honor of Thy Holy Name."

At age twelve, he was again presented to the temple priests and re-presented to the people as a servant of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was probably given instructions like this: "you there stand an upright man and Mason, and I give it you strictly in charge ever to walk and act as such before God and man".

This really marks the beginning of John's ministry. After several years of preparation, he assumed his divine calling, fulfilling the mission he was sent to do. That is, to prepare the nation of Israel for the coming Messiah.

At that time, the law under which the nation of Israel lived was the law as given to Moses and interpreted by religious leaders. The law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, was the basis of all action. John started preparing Israel for the new great commandment to be given by the Messiah, the law of Love and Charity.

John's ministry theme was: Repent and be Baptized. Repent, or change your behavior, and be baptized as a symbol of cleaning, and as a public profession of repentance. John gained a large following; he was given the name—John the Baptizer. Interestingly, many of these followers were reluctant to follow the Messiah.

One question often asked after repentance and baptism was, "What shall I do?" In the Book of Luke, John upset the religious leaders by saying, "If you have two coats, give one to someone who needs it." That also applies to one who has more than enough food. Share it! He could have said, "should you ever meet a member of the human family, especially a Brother Mason, in a like destitute situation, it would be your duty to contribute to his relief as liberally as his necessities might require, and your ability permits"; for this is the principle upon which the Kingdom of God is erected. In Luke 3: 12-13, John tells the tax collector to take no more than that to which you are entitled, even if it be legal.

John the Baptist is probably known by more people for his stand taken with Herod, whom he told his relationship with his brother's wife was outside the will of God. In John's case standing up for what was right resulted in his imprisonment and subsequently his being beheaded.

Finally, in summing up the place of John the Baptist as a patron saint of Masonry, may we ask the question: "If John the Baptist spent his entire life seeking, finding, and following the Lamb of the tribe of Judah, can we as Master Masons do any less?"

Reference

Griggs, C.B. (2023). The Holy St. John (John The Baptist). Retrieved from: <https://lamason.com/john-the-baptist/>.