

## **Freemasonry and Johannine Christianity**

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### **Introduction**

The United Grand Lodge of England was formed on June 24, 1717. This, of course, is St. John's Day, when Freemasons celebrate the feast of John the Baptist. June 24<sup>th</sup> corresponds approximately to the summer solstice, which marks the longest day and shortest night of the year. The winter solstice, marking the shortest day and longest night of the year, corresponds approximately to December 27, which happens to be the other St. John's Day, when Freemasons celebrate the feast of John the Evangelist.

The "Holy Saints John," as we refer to them, are said to be two eminent patrons of Freemasonry. Some early Masons and their Lodges were referred to as St. John Masons, St. John's Men, and St. John Lodges. The Baptist was even regarded as the patron of stonemasons in Europe during the Middle Ages, with guilds calling themselves the Fraternity of St. John the Baptist and so forth. Of course, we all know the familiar ritual greeting and response: "Whence came you? From a Lodge of the Holy Saints John at Jerusalem."

Interestingly, there is nothing definitive in the history of Freemasonry to account for the presence of the Johns, so it is puzzling that these two men should make so many appearances in Masonic ritual, especially during obligations. The only ritual explanation given for the Saints John is offered in the First Degree Lecture where it is said that "Lodges at the present time are dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist... two eminent patrons of Masonry... Since their time, there is or should be represented in every well furnished Lodge a certain point within a circle... This circle is supported by two perpendicular parallel lines representing Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist..."<sup>1</sup>

It has been suggested that the two parallel lines representing the Saints John mark the summer and mid-winter solstices, but this pure speculation. And yet they must be attached to the Fraternity for a reason, for surely our Masonic forefathers were not prone to adopting symbolism

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<sup>1</sup> AZ Ritual.

arbitrarily. What's more, our Masonic forefathers *did* in fact incorporate symbols cryptically and auspiciously. Therefore, this presentation seeks an esoteric understanding of the two Saints John, drawing on esoteric lore, philosophy, and religious history. From my own study of Freemasonry and esoteric literature, I have become increasingly interested in researching a secret tradition of esoteric Christianity that has survived into the present within Freemasonry. This tradition has been referred to as both Johannine and Johannite Christianity, but I prefer to think of it as "Temple Christianity." Whatever one chooses to call it, it is clear that the Saints John play a crucial role in the secret transmission.

### **Sacred History**

The information presented in this paper is based on Sacred History and esoteric lore. Sacred History is that history of the world and of humanity that has been transmitted through the ages via the holy books and revelation. It does not base validity solely on dry-bones facts, historical corroborations, or eyewitness accounts. Rather, it places tremendous value on a particular worldview and on a certain implied meaning. In this way, Sacred History is bound up with the collective memory of mankind, not with material culture. Another word for this could be mythology, however it does not mean that Sacred History, or ancient myths in general for that matter, are untrue.

In the words of Karen Armstrong: "Today the word 'myth' is often used to describe something that is simply not true. A politician accused of a peccadillo will say that it is a 'myth', that it never happened. When we hear of gods walking the earth, of dead men striding out of tombs, or of seas miraculously parting to let a favored people escape from their enemies, we dismiss these stories as incredible and demonstrably untrue. Since the eighteenth century, we have developed a scientific view of history; we are concerned above all with what actually happened. But in the pre-modern world, when people wrote about the past they were more concerned with what an event had meant. A myth was an event which, in some sense, had happened once, but which also happened all the time. Because of our strictly chronological view of history, we have no word for such an occurrence, but mythology is an art form that points beyond history to what is timeless in human existence, helping us to get beyond the chaotic flux of random events, and glimpse the core of reality."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Armstrong, Karen, *A Short History of Myth*, p. 7.

## **John the Baptist**

John the Baptist is the child of the summer solstice. In early depictions, John is portrayed as a giant, with Jesus as a small figure, a reference to a passage of scripture. John was born six months apart from Jesus. His mother was the elderly Elizabeth, and his father was the priest Zechariah. The parents did not expect another child because of their age, and so considered John a gift from God. The angel appeared heralding his birth to Zechariah in the temple before the altar of sacrifice. The angelic announcement of John's activity is identical to Jesus': "And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zachariah saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zachariah: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth."

Adhering to the angel's message, John was dedicated to the strict Nazerite Order. Over time John developed himself in the Order spiritually, while becoming increasingly aware of the poverty of spirit overcoming mankind, that the end was near. Only the promise of the coming messiah soothed his pain. He became a wanderer and a hermit and most likely mixed with the Essenes, whose practices of baptism resemble his own. He stayed in the same cave that was once inhabited by the prophet Elijah 800 years earlier and became deeply connected with him on a spiritual level. Around his 30th year, the state of humanity in Judea became too great and he left and began his public preaching career. He preached at the Jordan River, crying out, "Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Josephus tells us that many crowds came to hear his cries at the Jordan.

Luke's account ends with John being imprisoned, and the last we hear of John in the Gospel of Luke is an offhand remark made by Herod referring to John's execution. However, the legacy of the Baptizer lives on in the tradition of the Mandaeans, a very early gnostic group still active in Iran, Syria and Jordan. Some scholars connect the Mandaeans with the Nazerite Order. They recognize several prophets, especially John the Baptist. Mandaeans do not consider John to be the originator of their religion but they view him as their greatest teacher, tracing their beliefs back to Adam. Mandaeans believe that Jesus was a "false messiah" who corrupted the teachings entrusted to him by John.

Another important aspect of the Johannite Christian tradition, possibly preserved in Freemasonry, refers to a belief that was condemned as a heresy by the Catholic Church. This belief is known as Adoptionism, and it is the idea that the Logos, or cosmic being of the Christ, the Sun Being, adopted or possessed the body of Jesus during the baptism by John in the Jordan and occupied the body of Jesus of Nazareth for 3 years to fulfill its mission on Earth, leaving the body at the last moment before Jesus' death on the cross on Golgotha; hence his cry of "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" According to biblical scholar Bart Ehrman, early manuscripts of Luke 3:22 that recount Jesus's baptism in the Jordan translate the line in that passage as "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." Ehrman argues that the Church altered this translation to read "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" in later manuscripts in order to counteract proponents of Adoptionism.

### **John the Evangelist**

One of the most important books of the Bible for esotericists is John's Gospel. Indeed, in the high degrees of many orders, this gospel is used for the obligation. Also, even higher degrees touching on Rosicrucianism utilize the Apocalypse of St. John. Why? And who wrote these two books? For 2000 years it was believed John, the brother of James the apostle, son of Zebedee, wrote the books of John. However, in the 20th c. the Swiss theologian Johannes Kreyenbeuhl, through an intensive comparative study of the 4 gospels, discovered that Lazarus and John, the disciple whom the lord loved, were in fact the same person. The writer of the gospel of John never names himself, but drops many hints as to it being written by the disciple whom Jesus loved. And so this is John the Evangelist, who wrote the 4th gospel, who died as Lazarus and was *raised* by Christ to receive a new status as an initiate, and a new name: John.

We could also call him Lazarus John. It was he who wrote the 4<sup>th</sup> gospel at Ephesus at an advanced age and who finally wrote the book of Revelation at Patmos. The 4<sup>th</sup> gospel, which gives biographical details of Lazarus, is in part then an autobiography written in the third person. Lazarus John had two sisters, Martha and Mary Magdalene. He was from a rich family in Jerusalem and later inherited his father's wealth. We know this from a report that lists the lands throughout Palestine which the family owned, even a health spa where Mary worked before she desired to follow the Christ. Lazarus was educated and active in public affairs. Luke tells us that he was the same age as Jesus and half a year younger than John the Baptist. He was not one of

the 12 but had a special relationship with Christ. He was a disciple, the disciple whom the lord loved, and he became a follower of Christ Jesus. He dwelt among the apostles and followers, even looked after them financially, until he contracted an unknown disease and died, and after three days the Christ restored him back to life.

I would like to suggest that this was actually a process of initiation. There it reads, “The sickness is not unto death,” a veiled way of saying it was a ritual, or ceremonial, death. This is not to suggest that Lazarus was not on the brink of death before he was raised. We must utilize a both/and logic when it comes to Sacred History. What does the word love mean here, anyway? The secret book of Mark, a gnostic MS found in the Palestine desert, describes an initiation of Lazarus as performed by Christ, which is sealed with a kiss. In some high degrees for example there is still a kiss given to the candidate by the master, usually on the forehead or cheek, such as in certain Templar rites. This is not a romantic kiss, but something esoteric.

The initiation of Lazarus occurred about 5 weeks before the Passion Week. John then accompanied Christ Jesus through all subsequent important events leading up to the end, indeed he is last one standing under the cross with Jesus’ mother after the other apostles had fled. After the crucifixion, John helped support the remaining apostles but he withdrew from public view, as both the Romans and the Jews were suspicious of him. He looked after Mother Mary, for Christ gave him this task from the cross. With the rise in anti-Christian forces, he and Mary fled to Ephesus and lived there until she died. Some of this account is taken from Katharina Emmerich, however the house was later identified and tourists now visit it regularly.

Legend tells us that John helped his sister Mary and others escape to France, and this tradition is commemorated in Chartres Cathedral. John grew extremely old in Ephesus, celebrating mass daily, and building the community in Christ. In his nineties, he was called the Presbyter, the elder. One day he was preaching in Ephesus and the Romans came and demanded he offer sacrifices to the Caesar’s gods. When he refused they arrested him and brought him to Rome, where they plunged him into vat of boiling oil to break his will. But he survived and so he was expelled to Patmos, where he received the vision of the apocalypse.

After Emperor Domitian was killed, there was peace in the empire for Christians for a time, and John returned to Ephesus and wrote the 4th gospel, dictating it from memory to his closest pupil. It is said that when he was ready to die, he informed his followers to prepare a coffin and climbed in of his own accord. His last words were simply “Little children, love one

another.” Then he relaxed into the coffin and died. This occurred on June 24th, the birthday of John the Baptist, with whom he remains closely associated.

### **Johannine Traditions and Freemasonry**

What I am suggesting to you here is a secret tradition of Christianity passed on to John the Evangelist, rather than James and/or Peter via, Rome as the Church contends. There is also the secret tradition surrounding St. John the Baptist. Thus, my argument is that these two secret traditions converge in Masonry; hence the two patron saints of Masonic Ritual, and also the whence came you, from a lodge of the Holy Saints John (plural) at Jerusalem.

After all, there is a legend that the followers of St. John the Evangelist came to Scotland in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to escape the orthodox dogmas of Rome. Also, in the Middle Ages the monks in Fenagh Abbey in Ireland claimed St. John the Evangelist was a Culdee, a kind of Scottish and Irish Christian monk. This may account for the distinct branch of Celtic Christianity. What’s more interesting, perhaps, is this connection for the possible secreting of the esoteric Johannine Christian teachings within the Freemasonic initiatory system, perhaps even as it mixed with the Druids and stonemasons in the area. Even the main site of Celtic Culdee Christianity was located where, since 1311, there now exists what is known as the Cathedral of St Andrew.

Furthermore, the great Christian occultist Eliphas Levi describes the secret religion of the Templars as being Johannism. Although they appeared outwardly Catholic, their mission was to rebuild the temple of Solomon based on the vision of Ezekiel. He describes these St. John Christians as adopting certain Cabalistic doctrines, and they viewed the gospels symbolically and allegorically. However, that is not to say that they did not also hold a literal view of them as well. Again, this consists of both/and logic. The figure of St. John was key to unlocking the secrets of these allegories. For these beliefs and others, which included worshipping the head or skull of St. John the Baptist, the Templars were accused of heresy and later executed. However, Albert Pike writes in *Morals and Dogma* that “the [Templar] Order ... lived under other names and [was] governed by Unknown Chiefs, revealing itself only to those who in passing through a series of degrees had proven themselves worthy to be entrusted with the dangerous secret...” Needless to say, this idea persists in Masonry in the Royal Order of Scotland, the York or American rite, also under the so-called Larmenius Charter in Mark Masons Hall in London.

Today, there exists a lineage of Templar Johannism that began in France as the Johannite Church of Primitive Christians by French priest Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This sect bases its teachings on Fabré-Palaprat's claimed discovery of the *Levitikon* gospels as well as the teachings of both the Saints John. This tradition points to the Larmenius Charter as a continuation of the transmission of the Knights Templar lineage of grandmasters into the present. This Johannite tradition also holds close ties with various Martinist lineages, and there was even the later idea included that the Baphomet worshiped by the Templars was in fact the head or skull of John the Baptist.

In short, the secret tradition of St. John the Baptist believes that John was the true messiah, not Jesus, a version of Christianity that was safeguarded within the Order of Knights Templar. The secret tradition of St. John the Evangelist, on the other hand, believes that Jesus initiated Lazarus, his named was changed to John, and it was he who was bestowed with the esoteric teachings of Christianity; his followers came to Scotland, where those teachings were paired with Druidic and stonemason rites. Both of these Johannine traditions converge in a very interesting way in what I am calling Temple Christianity, and they have been preserved within Freemasonry up until the present.

Or at least that is one way to look at it.

Thank you, Fratres.