

**THE OLD PAST MASTER
THE HOLY SAINTS JOHN
&
THE POINT WITHIN A CIRCLE**

One of the important symbols of the Craft is the Point Within a Circle, bounded by two parallel lines, and capped by the Volume of the Sacred Law. We are told that the Circle represents that boundary of our passions and desires beyond which we should not stray, as delineated by the Holy Writings. It may also denote that we, being the center point that the compasses circumscribe to outline the circle, are equally near to The Great Architect, or it may signify that our existence is encompassed by and we exist within the being of the Great Architect. The parallel lines are said to represent St. John the Baptist – for his inflexible fidelity to his trust and his God, even unto death [as was one famous in Masonic history]; and St. John the Evangelist – who teaches brotherly love, to subdue our passions, charity, and to aid widows and orphans. These values are particularly significant to us as Masons, and it is singularly appropriate that these values should be appended to the Point Within a Circle, as reinforcing the teaching of the Sacred Writings, and our spiritual rising above our material passions – as represented by the compasses, by which the Circle is delineated.

Historically, the Egyptians used the point within the circle, bounded by two erect cobras which respectively represented the power and wisdom of the divine creator, and the point representing the deity. For us, Jachin and Boaz would be equally applicable in place of the serpents, and the candidate could represent the balance point between the two – divine wisdom [Chokmah] and Generative Power [Geburah] becoming balanced in the Third Pillar [or point] in the Beauty of Harmony [Tipareth], as we have discussed in the Fellowcraft instructional lectures. If we think of the point representing also the “god within” – our divine spark through which we aspire to understand the nature of Deity -- the point within the circle informs us as to the meaning and intent of our Craft Lodge degree structure and philosophy. A most powerful symbol.

While our Lodges are erected, or consecrated, to the Great Architect, they are, in America, “dedicated” to the Holy Saints John. This harks back to a custom among the Jews, who are said to have “dedicated” profane things, but both “consecrated” and “dedicated” sacred things. Prior to the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, our teachings state that the Lodges were originally dedicated to King Solomon, our first most excellent Grand Master, and later to the Holy Sts. John.

When they were first dedicated thus is unclear. Mackey claims that during the 16th century [the 1500s] St. John the Baptist was considered the peculiar patron of Freemasonry, but that sometime later St. John the Evangelist was added. Coil, in his writings, feels that, since there was no mention of this in the portion of the Constitution of 1723 dealing with dedication, and it was in the Prestonian lectures of 1772, it happened sometime between those dates. Personally, I believe that Mackey is right, in this instance, as the early exposes of the ritual run: “From whence came you? From the Holy Lodge of St. John’s.” Also, certain lodges were referred to as

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St. John Lodges or St. John Masons – these were ones which would not join the new Grand Lodge.

It seems clear that the St. John referred to was John the Baptist. It is also clear that in the early 1700's John the Evangelist became attached to Masonry. Indeed, the 1726 minutes of the lodge which met at the Swan and rummer Tavern, in London, indicates that officers were elected for six month terms, and the installations were on June 24 [St. John the Baptist Day] and December 27 [St. John the Evangelist Day. The premier Grand Lodge itself was formed on June 24, 1717. This clearly indicates that these two Saints had significance in Masonry, or else why would those dates be chosen. We continue to celebrate those patron Saints' days to the present here in America, although English lodges, since the union of 1813, went back to dedicating themselves to King Solomon, or to God and the memory of the Royal Solomon.

What we may have is simply a confusion in terms. There appears to have been little formality about constituting a lodge in the early days – much less, having a formal dedication. Lodges under the premier Grand Lodge didn't even have a formal document allowing them to work as lodges until 1757, when the Grand Lodge started issuing warrants. It seems to me though, that you can conceptually dedicate your lodge to certain concepts or ideals, without any formal cornerstone laying or “dedication” of the building, or a laying on of hands by a Grand Lodge, and that is probably the case in regards to the Holy Sts. John.

A little history and a little spirituality. I hope you enjoyed the above.

**FRATERNALLY AND FONDLY,
JOHN D. NELSON, P.M.**