

In the Spirit of John the Baptist

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As a candidate becomes initiated into the First Degree, he becomes familiar with the Lodge of Masons for the first time. In doing so, he also becomes familiar with “the Holy Saint John” – or, rather, two of them: Saint John the Baptist and Saint John the Evangelist. While consideration of both of them is certainly rewarding, introduction of both is beyond the scope of this article: we will limit ourselves here to an introduction of John the Baptist, and leave John the Evangelist for another article.

John the Baptist was a powerful personality in his own right, and is given a unique role in Christianity due to his precursory relationship with Jesus. Historically, John the Baptist was a very popular Jewish religious leader at the time of the Christ. His message was peaceful righteousness towards brethren and piety towards God, and he reached out to the lame, the outcast, and the despised, including the hated tax collectors. His ministry resonates strongly with the ministry of Jesus, and a non-Christian Masonic student might admire John the Baptist for prototyping those great teachings.

For the Christian Mason, John’s identity and importance is clearly laid out in the gospels. The story of John’s baptism of Jesus is one of the few common accounts in all four Gospels. In all the gospels, John denied being the Lord but acknowledged being one who paved the way for the Lord, and he became one of the first true and outspoken believers in the Christ. This recognition began when, upon John’s baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came from Heaven as a dove and rested on Jesus. The synoptic gospels go a step further and have a voice coming from Heaven reaffirm that John’s interpretation. This event was the initiation of Jesus’s ministry, and so John the Baptist holds the unique honor of beginning the story that ends with the cross.

As a Masonic archetype, John the Baptist could represent ‘a voice calling from the wilderness’, a faithful and outspoken leader devoted to God in a time when many have turned away. The story of John teaches us to bring ourselves into order, emulating those great virtues that the Grand Architect has designed into the consciousness of humanity, and to be receptive to the presence and spirit of peace whenever it may appear. To dedicate our Lodge to Saint John the Baptist admonishes us to be pious leaders among people, but not to become self-centered or to forget our due role within this Creation.

May we ever heed that admonishment and act in that model.