

THE WINTER SOLSTICE

(Paper presented by Bro. Joseph Virdo` - Runnymede Lodge n. 619 - December 14, 2011)

The celebration of the Winter Solstice, also known as the Festivity of St. John the Evangelist, has become a custom and a tradition for Runnymede Lodge. Through the portrayal of this ancient Masonic Ritual dedicated to exaltation of the Light, the Brethren of this Lodge want to regain a connection of a so precious link with the past and pay homage to the celestial event that takes place this particular time of the year. This occurrence is also the opportunity for the renewal of loyalty to everything that in Freemasonry is symbolized by St. John the Evangelist and by St. John the Baptist celebrated in June.

Saint John the Baptist, represented as the inverted pyramid, the Alchemical sign for water, representing the spiritual and emotional love. St. John the Evangelist, represented as the pyramid pointing up symbolizing fire that is the drive and will of action. When placed together, they symbolize the perfect balance of darkness and light, life and death.

These two great teachers, preachers and wise men have influenced with their lives and their works, the doctrine and teachings of Freemasonry. They exemplified the basic principles of our ancient Fraternity in their daily lives through their words and deeds. Freemasonry honors them because they were living examples of the Golden Rule and their practice of love for their fellowmen, and their love of their Creator. Their festivals falling upon the two extremes of the year well represent the cycle of nature and of human life, and thereby give us a key to the whole philosophy of Masonry.

It is important for us therefore, to understand well the purpose and to interpret usefully the message of this celebration, for in it, as we have seen during the ceremony much of Masonic philosophy is expressed.

The word "Solstice" comes from the Latin words Sol stetit, which literally means "the Sun stood still". For about four days in late December and again in late June, the Sun appears to rise and set at almost exactly the same places. Its rising and setting points appear to stand still - hence the name Solstice.

The Solstice thus is the day that each year marks the turning point for the return of the sun. The invariable course of the planets in heaven and the eternal cycle of yearly solstices constitute the most striking demonstration of the order that reigns in Nature.

The seasonal significance of the winter solstice is in the reversal of the gradual lengthening of nights and shortening of days. Depending on the shift of the calendar, the winter solstice in the Northern Hemisphere usually occurs on December 21 or 22 each year.

This is when the Sun reaches its lowest level and the brightness and warmth of the shortest day light of the year is weakened just for an instant by the darkness of the longer night. Then it begins a new cycle resuming its annual course and giving again fertility and joy to nature.

For us Freemasons this is a renewal of our initiation. It is a message of Balance, of Love and Hope.

It is a time and season for inner reflection as we begin to end the present year and prepare to enter the new one, and a new chapter of our life.

This, my Brethren is the message of this celebration.