



voice of the orient

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE SCOTTISH RITE, ORIENT OF ARKANSAS



The Circumpunct and the Saints' John

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DECEMBER 2025

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DECEMBER 2025

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How many Santa hats are in this issue?

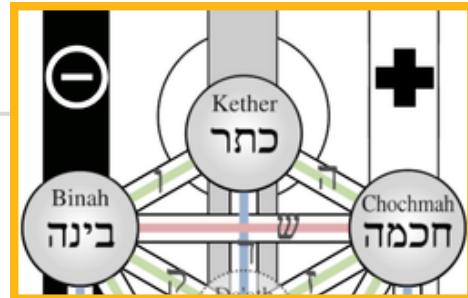
The answer is on the back page under Mitch's email.

Hint: this one counts

The Circumpunct and the Saints' John

Bro. Trey Youngdahl, 32°

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Once again, the Craft is preparing to celebrate Saint John's Day. It marks the moment when the sun, having reached its lowest point in the heavens, begins its slow return. In ancient cosmology, this was understood as the rebirth of light itself- victory over darkness.

It's Just a Shed: A Lesson From My Father

Ill. Jon Walter, 33°

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Reflection on the Holidays

SOVEREIGN GRAND INSPECTOR GENERAL

Happy Holidays,

It is that time of year again. The Thanksgiving holiday in November and the Christmas holiday in December are upon us. It seems to always sneak up on me, although the Christmas decorations seem to be for sale in stores earlier each year.

Both holidays encourage us to reflect on our blessings and to express our thankfulness. As we stay busy with our daily lives, it is easy to forget how blessed we are and to not culture a thankful attitude. This time of year is a good time to pause and consider these important matters.

For me, I am so blessed by the Masonic fraternity. The often used and trite saying that “I get more out of it than I put in it” is really true. Here are just some of the things in Freemasonry that I am thankful for:

- Deep and abiding brotherhood/friendships with so many brethren and their families
- A ritual and a philosophy of self-improvement and virtue
- Brethren who are such wonderful examples of charity, relief, and truth; who demonstrate the ideals of Freemasonry outside the lodge in their daily walk of life. “These generous principles extend further, every human being has a claim upon your kind offices”.
- Our beautiful Albert Pike Memorial Temple; the brethren who built it and passed it down to us, the brethren who contribute today to ensure its future, and all those who have worked so hard in recent years to restore its luster
- Visionary leaders of our various Masonic bodies

These are but a few of the things about our fraternity that I am thankful for. I hope that you will use this time of year to pause and reflect on what the fraternity means to you. I want to wish you and yours a wonderful holiday season this year. Peace be with you and yours!



III. C. James, Graham, 33°, PGM
Sovereign Grand Inspector General
Orient of Arkansas



A Christmas Message

GRAND MASTER OF MASONS IN ARKANSAS

Greetings Brethren,

As we enter this blessed Christmas season, we are reminded of the enduring gifts that Freemasonry brings into our lives—brotherhood, compassion, and the shared commitment to building a better world. During this time of joy and reflection, may we also treasure the most precious gift of all: our families. They are the quiet strength behind our service, the source of our inspiration, and the heart of every good work we undertake.

In our Scottish Rite fellowship, we are bound not only by our obligation but by our shared hope for peace, unity, and understanding among all people. May this season renew our dedication to living the values we profess—charity, truth, and the constant pursuit of light.

From my family to yours, I extend heartfelt wishes for a Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with blessings, harmony, and continued fraternal growth. May the Great Architect of the Universe guide us with wisdom and keep our families safe in the months ahead.

M.W. Michael Olegario, 33°
Grand Master of Masons in Arkansas



The Circumpunct and the Saints' John

BY BRO. TREY YOUNGDAHL, 32°



Once again, the Craft is preparing to celebrate Saint John's Day. It marks the moment when the sun, having reached its lowest point in the heavens, begins its slow return. In ancient cosmology, this was understood as the rebirth of light itself—victory over darkness.

The feast days of the Holy Saints John, June 24 and December 27 respectively, fall near the summer and winter solstices, the two great turning points of the solar year. The point within the circle is the alchemical symbol for the Sun, making the point within the circle a representation of each of the solstices on either side of the solar year. St. John the Baptist is celebrated near the summer solstice, when the sun stands at its highest point and the daylight reaches its fullest strength. After this moment, the days begin to shorten. Fittingly, the Baptist says in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

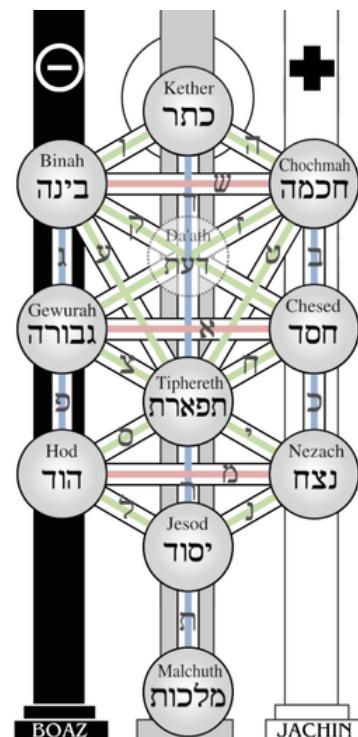
John the Baptist, preparing

the way and calling men to purification represents the active principle of the pillar of Jachin. John the Evangelist, however, could represent the passive principle of Boaz.

St. John the Evangelist is honored near the winter solstice, when the sun reaches its lowest point and darkness is greatest, yet the Light is about to return. From this moment forward, the days slowly lengthen. In the ancient mysteries, the period following the solstice was regarded as a sacred pause, a time when the initiate turns inward to receive wisdom rather than to act outwardly.

Astrologically, the winter solstice occurs as the sun enters Capricorn, a sign associated with discipline, structure, wisdom earned through trial, and the slow ascent toward spiritual mastery. St. John the Evangelist embodies these qualities through contemplation rather than action. Unlike the Baptist's fiery proclamation, John's

voice is quiet, inward, cosmic and meditative. His Gospel does not begin on earth but in eternity, speaking of the Logos, the divine Word, through which all things are made.



Kabbalah Tree of Life



St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist with a "point within a circle"



Christmas at the Temple



Bro. Tyler Van Brunt, 32° KSA competing against Ms. Gina Brinkley during Hon. Brad Kohanke's Christmas Family Fued



Brethren dropping off collected toys at Children's Hospital. Left to right: Brothers Matt Chrysler, Will Teeter, David Wright, Bill Teeter, Kevin Burnham (KCCH), and Mike Allen



A packed house for the annual Valley of Little Rock Christmas party

Hon. Shawn Casto, 32° KCCH & Mrs. Jeannie Casto



Christmas music by Ill. Andy Miller, 33° & Mrs. Brenda Miller



It's Just a Shed: A Lesson From My Father

BY ILL. JON WALTER, 33° ≠

When I was a young boy, I spent part of a summer helping my father build a shed in our backyard. To me, it was a grand project. I imagined it as a little house, and I thought every board had to be square, every nail straight, every line exact. But my father had a way of easing my worries when things didn't turn out quite right. If a cut was off by an inch or a nail bent halfway in, he would chuckle and say: "**Well, it's just a shed.**"

At first, I thought that meant the mistakes didn't matter because it wasn't an important building. But as I grew older, I realized that phrase carried a deeper lesson. My father wasn't telling me that quality didn't matter. He was reminding me that perspective did. The shed didn't have to be perfect to serve its purpose. It didn't have to win awards or impress anyone. It just needed to stand, to hold tools, and to give us the satisfaction of finishing what we started.

What started as his offhand comment turned into a saying I carried with me long after. To me, it meant: don't sweat the small stuff. Keep the big picture in mind. Don't let the little imperfections ruin the joy of the work. As I've grown older, I've come to hear in it other familiar truths: keep it in perspective... progress over perfection... pick your battles... the memory matters more than the mistake.

The shed itself became more than just a building. My father worked in it for years afterward. It became the place where he helped me with school projects and science fairs, patiently guiding me as we sawed, hammered, soldered, and experimented together. Later, after I left home, the shed never sat quiet. He filled it with woodworking projects, building toys, furniture, and keepsakes for his children and, eventually, his grandchildren.

In that way, the shed was



more than four walls and a roof. It was a workshop of love, a place where lessons were shaped into lasting gifts. Just as the shed itself carried the marks of imperfection, so too did some of those projects, but what endured was the joy they brought and the care that went into every piece.

Like me, my father was also a Scottish Rite Mason, though as a boy I didn't think much about it. Only later did I realize that many of the quiet lessons he lived out were the same principles he carried from the lodge into daily life. What he shared with me in the backyard was in many ways the same timeless wisdom he had received as a Brother.

Valley of Jonesboro

Though my father has been gone for many years now, I still find myself using that phrase. Sometimes I'll say it out loud. Other times, it just runs through my mind when I feel myself getting tangled in the small things that don't matter much in the long run. It always brings me back to center.

Freemasonry has deepened my appreciation for that simple lesson. In the lodge, we are taught to strive for improvement, to work diligently with our tools, to smooth our rough edges and make our lives a worthy offering to the Great Architect. But we are also reminded that we are not perfect stones. We are rough ashlar, gradually shaped by experience, by fraternity, and by faith. The Craft does not expect flawlessness, it expects steady effort.

That is where my father's

phrase speaks to me as a Mason. "It's just a shed" doesn't mean "don't care." It means "don't lose sight of what really matters." We can become so focused on chasing perfection that we forget to value progress. We can become so consumed with pointing out a brother's faults that we forget to see his effort. In the same way my father taught me to laugh off a bent nail, Masonry teaches me to look past small blemishes, my own and others', and to remember that the important thing is that we keep building.

The shed my father and I built was far from perfect, but it actually still stands, weathering storms and serving its purpose. More importantly, it stands as a reminder of those afternoons in the backyard, sawdust in the air, the sound of a hammer ringing, and a father teaching his

son a lesson that went far beyond lumber and nails.

In a way, that shed was like each of our lives: imperfect, yet useful; flawed, yet enduring; simple, yet full of meaning. When I think of it now, I hear not just my father's voice, but an echo of the teachings of the Craft. Strive to do your best, but don't let mistakes rob you of joy. Value the labor, even when the result isn't flawless. Remember that it is the spirit of the work, not just its precision, that gives it worth.

So I keep that phrase alive, passing it along when I can. Because in the end, life has many crooked boards and bent nails, but the real lesson is to keep building anyway. And when the little flaws appear, as they surely will, just smile, take a breath, and remember: It's just a shed.



Welcome to Jonesboro's
newest Master of the Royal
Secret, Bro. Bond, 32°

DeMolay State Junior Councilor
Blaine Phillips speaking to
Jonesboro Valley Brethren



Unity Through Rituals

BY BRO. NOEL NEIGHBOR, 32° KSA



A masonic initiation. Paris, 1745.

Most of us as Masons will no doubt agree that we are receiving benefits from our participation in rituals. Listing and describing benefits in Non-Masonic situations has been done by researchers as they have observed rituals in a variety of situations. While considering these descriptions, we should be able to see that the benefits listed for non-Masonic rituals are the same as for Masonic rituals.

Psychologists have described both physical and emotional effects that happen during rituals. Malchiodi (2021) discussed some of these. Entrainment refers to the

way that rhythmic systems of humans and animals interact with each other. Capable of becoming time-matched are rhythmic functions such as heart beats, respiration, hormone release and eye blinking. The term synchrony describes something similar as when people unconsciously match each other in actions, emotions, and thoughts. Emotional closeness may result from this. A kind of synchrony that is especially powerful is called collective effervescence during which there is an increase in energy and unity among individuals involved in rituals.

The effects of rituals may

be affected by conditions under which they are performed with conditions that increase effervescence being termed accelerators. Draper (2021) described some of these. Barriers to outsiders are suggested as accelerators. Others are walls, doorways, uniforms and guards. Internal barriers include requirements for mastery of certain tasks prior to full inclusion and practices that would be understood by members and not by outsiders. Observations of meetings and rituals of several groups showed that the more formal the ritual, the more difficult it was to maintain effervescence. Talks by members and testimonies had the

VALLEY OF FAYETTEVILLE

opposite effect. Do you recognize accelerators in your lodge?

Kiper and Mauro (2025) discussed the writings of Xygalatas, an anthropologist of significant reputation. He reported that in his experience, rituals are present in basically every culture and have several characteristics in common. He stated that "Rituals are memorable, casually opaque, command our attention, involve symbolic actions, and produce no obvious practical results.". Suggested also was that measuring the results of rituals is limited in real life as compared to what might be measured in a laboratory. He did find out, though, that to some degree measurements could be made with heart rate monitors. Participants in one experiment were divided into two groups who performed a psychological stress producing activity in a plain room and in a temple. Both groups experienced stress, but those in the

temple environment recovered more quickly from the stress showing that the space where a ritual is performed can affect performance. In another experiment it was found that collective effervescence could occur between active participants and passive observers when heart rate spikes occurred in both fire walkers and those watching them. It was suggested that rituals can also allow those involved to feel less unpredictability than in former traumatic life situations and may actually reduce struggles with PTSD.

Grief rituals have been found to produce positive results as discussed by Running, Tolle, and Girard (2008). The benefits of grief rituals were described as applied to Circle of Life hospice workers at one facility. Staff gathered at a wooden table at the facility office for a ritual involving events of the preceding week. At the beginning of each meeting a gong was struck to indicate the

beginning. Poems, music, or something symbolic were presented to identify the time as special and sacred. Deceased patients were discussed. Time was set aside for emotions to be expressed and tears shed. Finally, the gong was struck again to close the meeting. Honoring deceased patients and families and expressing loss and sadness in a controlled ritual environment was healing to those involved and decreased burn-out. Do you feel renewed energy and a stronger will to continue with our labors following a meeting at your lodge? ***After Masonic rituals do you feel more likely to be able to perform well in life?***



Valley of Fayetteville Calendar

- 1/24 Robert Burns Night
- 1/28 Stated Meeting
- 2/25 Stated Meeting
- 3/25 Stated Meeting
- 4/22 Stated Meeting

Ill. John Strange, 33°

BY HON. TOBY CROW, 32°, KCCH 

Illustrious Brother John E. Strange, a soft spoken true Southern gentleman, you've seen him here and there all about the state in many Masonic capacities. He graciously agreed to sit for an interview on June 9, 2025 at the Scottish Rite Library at Albert Pike Masonic Center located in Little Rock, Arkansas.

We started with where he began, born in Memphis, Tennessee on November 9, 1941 and raised in South Memphis to be exact. He attended A.B. Hill Grammar School, Southside High School, Memphis State University, Northwest Mississippi Jr. College in Senatobia and the University of Mississippi where he majored in Marketing and received his bachelor's degree.

Along his way he acquired skill at welding and early on worked at the Fisher Steel Company, was a golf instructor, and in certain circle was known as the "*Ole Miss Sandwich man.*" He received this moniker, as selling sandwiches at



Bro. John Strange working for the University of Mississippi Student Union Grille No. 42

night to dormitories, fraternity and sorority houses for the University of Mississippi Grille. He reminded that there were no McDonalds and fast food places back in the old days.

After getting his degree in Marketing he set out to be a salesman. Later in the interview when asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he replied, "*a salesman or lawyer.*" He was in the furniture sales industry close to 50 years. His childhood aspiration became his primary vocation. "*I traveled close to 50 years, every Monday I was hitting the road.*" He was a certified home furnishings rep for the National Home Furnishings Association and Furniture

Industry. Some companies he sold for over the years, Little Rock Furniture Manufacturing Company, Memphis Furniture Manufacturing Company and Florida Furniture Industries. Tagged into this is over the years he drove through 10 Cadillacs and 5 Mercedes in calling upon retail stores across Arkansas and Northeast Texas. Rounding out this question about vocations, he still is involved with Pine tree horticulture in Tennessee as a member of the Tennessee Forestry Association and Tree Farmers.

The Scottish Rite Library room was nice and quiet when Ill. Strange answered what motivated you to work hard or what motivates you now. He replied Duty as primary, then Truth. Lightening the mood he added, When I was a steel extrusion at Fisher Steel I decided this work was too hard and returned to the University to better myself.

Asked does he have a hero,

Membership Spotlight

VALLEY OF LITTLE ROCK

after a moment of reflection replied, "Yes, *Rudyard Kipling*." Then proceeded to recite, without skipping a beat, all of his favorite poem of Kipling's - "When Earth's Last Picture is Painted."

"When Earth's last picture is painted and the tubes are twisted and dried, When the oldest colours have faded, and the youngest critic has died, We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it-lie down for an aeon or two, Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall put us to work anew. And those that were good shall be happy; they shall sit in a golden chair; They shall splash at a ten-league canvas with brushes of comets' hair. They shall find real saints to draw from Magdalene, Peter, and Paul; They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be tired at all!" And only The Master shall praise us, and only The Master shall blame; And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame, But each for the joy

of the working, and each, in his separate star, Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They are!"

He went on to say also that his heroes included West Point Graduate and gentleman Robert E. Lee and the father of the modern automotive industry Henry Ford to round out his list of heroes.

Brother John was raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason on October 26, 1982 at Pulaski Heights Lodge #673. In 1989 and 2018 he was master of the lodge there at Pulaski Heights. Currently serving in the role of Chaplain. As far as his Grand Lodge service, he has served as a DDGM and as the Deputy Grand Lecturer and then as Grand Lecturer in 2023 and 2024 also currently in 2025. He does have his Certified Instructor Card (Blue card) and Second Section of the Masters Degree (Red card). He is a member of the York Rite, Chapter, Council and Commandery.

York Rite College, Royal Order of Scotland, Past member of the Shrine, Past Master Counselor of Demolay in Memphis and the McLemore Chapter of Demolay. He volunteered that his Grand Marquis the "lodge mobile" he drives around now has 300k miles on it. He lets his Mercedes Benz and Monte Carlo have a break every now and then.

Retrospectively he said his proudest accomplishments were three. When he received the Grand Lodge Medal of Honor, when he was coroneted with his 33rd degree and when he received Jesus as his personal savior in 1956.

When you see Ill. Brother John Strange stop and say hello to this truly treasured Southern Gentleman.



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