

*York Rite*

*of*

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*Freemasonry*



*Prepared by  
York Rite  
Association  
of Indiana*

# YORK RITE OF FREEMASONRY



*What and Why?*



THIS BOOKLET is proudly presented to a Brother Master Mason by members of the York Rite of Indiana, who sincerely urge him to thoughtfully read and reflect upon the important Masonic message it conveys.



*Prepared by*

The York Rite Association  
of Indiana



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## MASONS ARE BUILDERS!

*Brother Master Mason:*

THE BROAD HIGHWAYS that lead to further light in Masonry are a constant challenge to very earnest Craftsman to continue his Masonic journey—as many a Brother has done who has gone this way before him. That is why, sooner or later, every Master Mason comes face to face with these simple questions: “Just what is the York Rite of Freemasonry? Why should it interest me?”

The one and only purpose of this booklet is to answer those questions in clear and forthright manner. Here then, in exchange for a few minute of your time, is an opportunity to explore the time-honored pathways that lead to some of Freemasonry’s richest treasures.



As a master Mason you have learned that one *great goal* of Freemasonry is the betterment of mankind—the never-ending process of elevating men from darkness to light. That is its one and only reason for being. That is its soul!—without which our ancient and honorable Fraternity probably would have slipped into oblivion ages ago.

How, then, does Freemasonry seek to accomplish this noble mission? Certainly not by an appeal directed to the masses, for such efforts yield only temporary results at best. In its wisdom, the Fraternity has chosen the only method which can possibly have a lasting effect. Its energies are devoted *entirely to the individual*, and to the proposition of strengthening and broadening his character. Thus each Mason, by reason of his Masonic teaching, is better

qualified to serve his God, his county, his neighbor and himself, and to carry forward the Divine Plan of our gentle Craft. Thus is the light from our Temples transmitted to the heart of humanity.

And you, Brother Master Mason, are a vitally important link in that chain! For it is to *you*, the individual, that Freemasonry speaks; just as it is through you that she must carry forward her great mission.—Without you, she is weakened. With you, she is a mighty voice that will not be denied!

As her “Ambassador of Brotherhood,” therefore, you should be equipped with all of the working tools our Craft has to offer. Your Symbolic or Blue Lodge has given you the fundamentals. You have in your possession the pattern of Masonry, a “Blue-Print,” if you please, which outlines the foundation for your personal Masonic structure. But a builder must *build*, must add stone upon stone, until his structure gains strength, proportion and beauty.

So should the Master Mason add the “stones” of Masonic knowledge to the Temple he is building—to “improve himself in Masonry”—that he may be better equipped to discharge his obligations as a true and faithful member of the Craft.

And that is the *one great reason* why the York Rite beckons you to its portals, Brother Master Mason—to bring you that further light in Masonry which will add to your stature and your value as a citizen and as a Mason.

## WHAT IS THE YORK RITE?

THE YORK RITE of Freemasonry is a series of degrees which expand and enlarge upon the philosophy, the symbolism, the historical significance and the great truths inculcated in the Symbolic or Blue Lodge. With one exception, all are concerned with Ancient Craft Masonry.

As a Master Mason you know there is much in the teaching of our Craft that is “veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.” York Rite removes the “veil” from much that is hidden, dramatizes and expounds upon many Masonic fundamentals in a manner that clarifies and strengthens them. When thus brought to light in all their inherent beauty they are easy to understand and inspiring to see.

And all of this is accomplished with a minimum of effort by the candidate, for he becomes an active part of the work under a competent guide—*and there is nothing for him to memorize.*

The York Rite degrees are conferred by three separate Masonic bodies, each of which has its own governing or Grand Body which exercised complete authority over the particular degrees it controls. These bodies are briefly described in the following sections, and in the order in which the degrees are conferred. In the Chapter and Commandery the candidate usually receives only one degree during an evening. The two Council degrees customarily are conferred on the same evening.



## ROYAL ARCH MASONRY

GATEWAY TO THE YORK RITE

A CHAPTER of Royal Arch Masons confers four degrees, called *Capitular* degrees because they are the *capstones* of Ancient Craft Masonry. In the order conferred they are: (1) Mark Master, (2) Past Master, (3) Most Excellent Master, and (4) the degree of Royal Arch Mason. It is of the interest to note here that in 1813 the United Grand Lodge of England, mother of all regular and legitimate Freemasonry in the world, declared that “Ancient Craft Masonry consist of three degrees and no more, viz, those of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft ad Master Mason, *including the Holy Royal Arch.*”

Each of the four Capitular degrees has a definite purpose in view, and all, when combined, complete the story and the symbolism of King Solomon’s Temple—finally leading to the beginning of the *second* Temple, the Temple of Zerubbabel, with the recovery and the communication of that which was “lost” and for which you received a substitute in the Master Mason degree.

In the Mark Master degree we learn of methods used by the Craft in their labors on the temple of Solomon and attention is particularly directed to the essential values of order, regularity, discipline and masonic relief.

The Past Master degree is concerned with the art of presiding in the East and importance of leadership and its responsibilities. This degree closed with reverent emphasis

upon that Volume which, for centuries, has been the rule and guide of all Masons' -- the One Great Light of Masonry, the Sacred Book. No man can receive the Past Master degree and remain insensible to the privilege which is this in being a part of an institution that can inspire men to so reverence the Holy Book--that Great Light which will "guide you to all Truth, direct your path to the Temple of Happiness and point out to you the whole duty of man."

The third Chapter degree, Most Excellent Master, is entirely concerned with the completion and dedication of Solomon's Temple, that masterpiece of architecture and worship which the Kingdom of Israel erected to its Most High God. At last the Master Mason beholds the completed Temple in all its majesty and splendor, the object of all his hopes. There is pageantry, drama and abiding inspiration in this magnificent work, which requires a large cast, elaborate costuming and many properties.

Then quickly passing over a period of more than 400 years, we come to the stirring and awesome events of the Royal Arch degree. The Kingdom of Judah has fallen—the Craft's magnificent work is destroyed. Solomon's Temple to the most high God is desolate; the descendants of his people are captives in a foreign land.

Finally they are released from bondage, and with renewed faith and zeal the people of Israel begin the mighty task of rebuilding their city and the house of the Lord. The degree of Royal Arch Mason is largely concerned with the early stages in the construction of this second temple.

This *most sublime* degree is considered by many able Masonic scholars to be far more important than all which

have preceded it. The fact that it was once an important supplement to the Master Mason degree, as pointed out above, adds considerable weight to this opinion.

The Royal Arch is the complement of the Masters' degree, unfolding into a second volume the history and the sublime symbolism of that which was "lost"—and its final recovery. Without the Royal Arch the Master's degree is like a song half sung, a tale partly told, or a promise unfulfilled. Without it the Master Mason degree cannot be fully understood; but the two, combined, bringing perfection to our work and to our understanding.—That is why it is called the *most* sublime degree.



## COUNCIL MASONRY

A COUNCIL of Royal and Select Masters confers the *Cryptic* degrees of Masonry, so called because they are chiefly concerned with a crypt, or a certain subterranean vault with our legends inform us was known only to a *select* few of the Craft. The Council embraces the Royal Master degree, the Select Master and a third *optional* honorary degree known as the Super Excellent Master. All three explain and elaborate upon certain important phases of the Royal Arch.

With the destruction first Temple many important secrets remained buried for several hundred years. Their final discovery and interpretation forms the background for the degrees of Cryptic Masonry, which occupy a unique and highly important position in the Masonic system. Their

ceremonies and symbolism have a divine quality which endears the Council work to all who are privileged to receive it.

The *optional* and honorary Council degree, Super Excellent Master, concerns the final tragic days during the reign of Zedekiah, the last King of Judah. With highly dramatic action, the candidate is led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon; and he sees revealed in a manner never to be forgotten the punishment of Zedekiah for disobeying the commands of God and scoffing at the prophecies of Jeremiah. Fidelity to a trust reposed is the one great lesson of this superb degree, which is based upon one of the greatest dramas of Old Testament history.



## TEMPLAR MASONRY

WE COME now to the crowning body of the York Rite, the Commandery of Knight Templar, whose degrees—or Orders—are often designated as Templar or Chivalric Masonry because they have for their background the Age of Chivalry, during which the crusading knights of old ranged the Mediterranean area for more than four centuries—protectors of the weak and aged, sworn defenders of the Cross of Christ.

A Commandery of Knights Templar confers three Orders: (1) the Illustrious order of the Red Cross; (2) the Order of Malta and the Mediterranean Pass; and (3) the Order of the Temple, in which the candidate reaches the Christian grade

of the York Rite, passing from the Old Testament into the New.

The noble principles for which the ancient knights fought and died are the same which today motivate the Sir Knights of Templar Masonry—protection against all forms of oppression, relief of distress, defense of the Christian religion and acceptance of the teachings of Jesus. Today, as it ever has, life abounds with contrast—wealth and poverty, truth and falsehood, justice and injustice, liberty and oppression flourish side by side the world over. Men of purpose, born of Faith, filled with Hope and motivated by Charity are ever needed to shield the weak and helpless. This is the avowed purpose of the modern Knight Templar to meet that great need.

Sworn soldiers of the Cross of Living Christ, They wear the symbol of Calvary upon their breast! What higher privilege what graver responsibility can come to any man?

Supported by the flower of Knighthood, the ancient Order of the Temple stood the test of centuries, although the corrupt medieval church did it utmost to destroy the order by persecution. Modern Templar masonry may not be connected directly with the ancient Order but its faith is the same and its duties carry the same, responsibilities and the same hopes. Every Sir Knight thus has the God-given privilege to unfurl throughout the world the banner of Christian Faith, unfettered by sectarian creeds but as broad as the Grand Architect's infinite grace and as deep as His infinite love.

The history of modern Templarism is a record of Christian gentlemen whose accomplishments have contributed

abundantly to the uplift of mankind; and those who have toiled faithfully throughout the years have been richly endowed with that soul-satisfying peace and calmness of spirit which "passeth all understanding." Its Sir Knights have numbered among them many of the worlds truly great and it is a high honor to be knighted in one of their many Commanderies.

## CONCLUSION

*Brother Master Mason;* You will agree that our sick and confused world of today needs Freemasonry as never before. The reasons are obvious; but let us review them quickly:

Because in a godless world of greed and force, that has thrown spiritual values to the four winds of heaven, Freemasonry teaches self-restraint and reason. In a world permeated with the spirit of selfish rivalry, it teaches Universal Brotherhood? In a world of intolerance and bigotry, it teaches understanding and kindness. In a world of cynical disbelief, it teaches reverence for Deity. In a world foundering in the depths of a great moral and spiritual depression, Freemasonry teaches industry and self-reliance, and temperance and integrity. Its emphasis is always on the nobler point of view and finer choice of conduct. In a changing and superficial world it points to the eternal and fundamental principles that have emerged *unchanged* from every transition era, even as the eternal mountains emerge from the drifting clouds that temporarily obscure them.—it aids and comforts and reassures and inspires individuals. It leaps across the barriers of race and creed to draw together

the finest aspirations of all men and unite them in a Universal Brotherhood.

And there you have the reason why it is important for every Master Mason to become a *fully –informed* ambassador of the Craft—so he may effectively help the thousands, yes millions, of his Brethren who are endeavoring to carry the “torch of light” out of our Temples and into the heart of mankind.

Thus, as a Master Mason fresh from the invigorating and ennobling experience of the three symbolic degrees, York Rite beckons you in all sincerity to search for “further light” - to improve yourself in Masonry. And it invites you also to an expanded fellowship with men and Brethren who ever seek, in humanity’s name, to build with Plumb, Square and Level, that Temple of Character which is the great goal of our gentle Craft.