

Sir Knights –

In planning this York Rite year, the three Grand York Rite Presiding Officers in North Carolina very deliberately selected a theme of “It’s Your Rite” to allow a certain freedom of expression for the focus of the year’s activities. That main focus was intended to revolve around an effort to generate a thought process on the part of our members that might lead them to delve into the real meaning and purpose of our organization more than they might have in the past.

Through the year, the several District Meetings have allowed a discussion of these thoughts and given opportunity for reflection on some of the history of our Order and how that history has produced one of the most important of the many Masonic organizations.

Where and exactly how the Masonic Knights Templar gained its origin is a mystery, and one which will probably never be solved. Some suppose that it originated from some of the remnants of the original Knights Templar, that group of pious knights formed during the Middle Ages for the purpose of protecting pilgrims on their way to worship at the holy city of Jerusalem. Formed in the year 1113 with the distinguished Christian knight Hugh de Payens as its first Grand Master, the Templars grew rapidly in power and influence, only to be put asunder by the vile collusion of King Philip le Bel of France and Pope Clement V. One may recall the theory that the true roots of Freemasonry emanated from those few Knights Templar who were able to escape the treachery of the King and the Pope and make their way to the British Isles, eventually forming lodges of brethren that operated in total secrecy until coming out in the open in the year 1717 and forming the Grand Lodge of England. This theory, first pronounced by Andrew Michael Ramsay (Chevalier) in his famous Oration before the Grand Lodge of France in 1737, finds insufficient evidence to give it real credence when examined carefully. Popularized again in recent times by the late John Robinson in his immensely popular book, “Born in Blood,” it may be that this theory actually was at least somewhat influential in the gestation of the Knights Templar of today.

This much we know: that the Order was revived and came forth in glorious transformation. The cross was again assumed as a sign of universal good will toward all men. The only crusades now undertaken are pilgrimages of charity and mercy, under the vow that the religion of Christ should be defended; symbolically, with the sword and shield, and in actuality with indulgence in charitable thoughts, noble deeds, and an abiding faith in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man.

The first record of the conferring of the Templar degrees in America is in St. Andrews’ Royal Arch Chapter in Boston on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of August, 1769. Soon after, the degrees,

in whatever form they may have been at the time, were taken up by Thomas Smith Webb, to whom we owe so much of our present-day Masonic ritual, and were further developed and introduced into New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. The first Grand Encampment of which there is reliable record can be traced to South Carolina, where there still exists in the archives a seal bearing the date 1780. The Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States was instituted in the city of New York on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of June, 1816.

So, what are we to derive out of all of this? In tracing the lineage of this Order, our current York Rite, one of the two noteworthy appendant systems of true Masonry surviving and thriving almost three centuries after the exclamation to the world that there was such a thing as Masonry, it becomes abundantly clear that the three bodies of the York Rite, as diverse and complex as each may be, embody the very fabric of Freemasonry. They expand on our Masonic knowledge and provide a depth of understanding beyond the three degrees of the Blue Lodge, with a focus on the religious aspects of our endeavors. The Commandery ritual has a clear focus on the faith that is most often associated with the York Rite in general, that of Christianity, and helps to develop in us an even greater awareness of the necessity for those who find hope and redemption in the Son of God of defending His reminiscence and all the good that can be traced to faith in Him.

Our Masonic Code requires that to be done which ought to be done, simply because it is right, and not from any hope of reward; while Templarism teaches that we are to await the rewards of the valiant Templar, because they are pleasing in the sight of God, and He will provide our reward. A Knight Templar has been tried by the test of *truth*, which is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue, and is taught that his engagements are sacred and inviolable. Let us then take up our sword and shield, and press forward to the goal of a better world for those around us, with complete confidence and faith in the Great Leader of our Salvation, Jesus Christ our Lord.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”  
*John 1:1*

May the Grace of our Blessed Redeemer bring to each of you peace and prosperity during this New Year.

## **It's Your Rite!**

Fraternally,

William B. Brunk  
Grand Commander  
Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of North Carolina