

What Is The York Rite of Freemasonry?

While there are three main degrees of Freemasonry through which a brother progresses during his time within the fraternity, there are several rites of Freemasonry, which are also known as progressive degrees.

The two most well-known rites are the Scottish Rite and the York Rite, the latter being the topic of interest for this article. We're going to examine the existence of the York Rite, explore its history and understand why many Freemasons elect to pursue this degree.

The history of the York Rite

After the formation of the first grand lodge in England in 1717, it was widely agreed that Freemasons the world over would conform to only three degrees: Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason.

The reason for this was to ensure that there was continuity of messaging and values in lodges across the world, and although there wasn't a centralized body controlling Freemasonry, the degrees would be a way of structuring a Mason's journey.

That being said, many lodges wished to confer other degrees of Freemasonry that they believed to be of critical importance. One such degree that many lodges wanted to include was the York Rite.

The York Rite teaches an integrated story of ancient craft Masonry. **It is constituent of three bodies: the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, the Council of Royal and Select Masters, and the Commandery of Knights Templar.**

Freemasonry within the York Rite is based on the early remnants of Craft Masonry that were practiced in the early eighteenth century. It takes its name from the English city of York and has been widely described today as the oldest and purest of the Masonic rites.

All Masons within the York Rite must be a Master Mason. The rite teaches an integrated story of craft Masonry by depicting a series of legendary and biblical events, centered around the building of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

The evolution of the York Rite within Freemasonry

You are likely to hear many people refer to the York Rite as the American Rite, which you might find peculiar given the fact that it was named after the English city of York. Its ties to America are not initially apparent.

The reason for this is the fact that the York Rite was widely practiced by the founding fathers and was a critical element of Freemasonry before the formation of the country we know as the United States today.

Masons associate the York Rite with the Bible. Indeed, much of its teachings lean heavily on Biblical passages and allegories, particularly compared to other rites and degrees of Freemasonry. For this reason, many outsiders erroneously consider the York rite to be a form of religion.

However, like all Masonic teachings, the York Rite is not a religion. The only pre-requisite to complete the York Rite degree is to be a Master Mason and to have faith in a Supreme Being, and the latter is fundamental for all Masons, regardless of degree.

While the York Rite does focus heavily on Biblical teachings, it also teaches Masons about themes relating to the medieval crusades, as well as elements of ancient craft Masonry. However, many of the York Rite degree secrets are heavily guarded and are only shared with those completing the degree.

The structure of the York Rite

Within the York Rite, a Master Mason may become a member of three bodies: the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, the Council of Royal and Select Masters, and the Commandery of Knights Templar.

The Knights Templar, in particular, deserves further comment. The Knights Templar is a Christian-oriented fraternal organization that is based on the myths and teachings of the 11th-century order.

The knights were laymen who defended Christians traveling to Jerusalem and played an essential part in early Christian mythology. The knights took vows

of poverty, chastity, and obedience and were renowned for their courage in battle, which placed them on a pedestal over common men of the time. This is critical to understanding the Knights Templar movement today, as members display their courage in different ways, by organizing fundraising events, in particular, raising millions of dollars each year for a variety of causes.

While there is undoubtedly a crossover between the values and the history of Christianity and the Knights Templar movement, it's inaccurate to say that the Knights Templar is a Christian organization, as it accepts members of various denominations.

Moreover, in addition to the York Rite bodies, several Masonic bodies are invitational in nature, where membership of them is predicated on membership in the Royal Arch of Freemasonry.

While this starts to get a little confusing, it's important to remember that they are all still bodies of Freemasonry; it's just the degrees that are appendant. They are also not obligatory, and the only degrees through which Masons must progress are the three core degrees that have already been introduced in this article.

The degrees of York Rite Freemasonry

Although York Rite is a degree of Freemasonry itself, it actually has many degrees within it that you must understand to avoid confusion. Below we have laid out the various degrees, as well as the ways in which the York Rite is organized:

Royal Arch Freemasonry – The Holy Royal Arch, Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, Mark Master, Virtual Past Master, Most Excellent Master, Royal Arch Mason.

Cryptic Masonry, Council of the Royal and Select Masters – Royal Master, Select Master, Super-Excellent Master.

Commandery of Knights Templar – Order of the Red Cross, Order of the Knights of Malta, Order of the Knights Templar.

So when people inform you that there are only three degrees of Freemasonry, you might be a little confused! This is because there are three established

degrees of Freemasonry that each Mason will pass through during his time within the fraternity.

All other degrees, such as these presented within the York Rite, are optional and usually invitational in nature. They offer Masons an insight into different elements of Freemasonry that they may find of interest.

Conclusion: what is the significance of the York Rite of Freemasonry?

To any aspiring Mason or any brother currently within the fraternity, for that matter, Freemasonry's additional degrees are something of an allure. They are intriguing because they offer an insight into Freemasonry that is not shared by all brothers.

Yet, it can be a little confusing to those not well versed within Freemasonry. There are so many elements of the York Rite and differing degrees that it can be difficult for Masons to understand what they are signing up for.

While there is undeniably a vital religious element to the teachings of the York Rite, or at least the Knights Templar, a firm belief in Christianity is not a prerequisite for Masons wishing to complete the York rite.

However, given that it relies heavily on Biblical teachings for much of its content, it's advised that those wishing to undertake the York Rite are well-versed in Christianity to retain an interest in the degree's teachings.

Overall, the York Rite of Freemasonry is significant because it is a way for brothers to explore elements of Freemasonry that are not part of the core curriculum and gain a deeper understanding of some of the historical roots of the fraternity.