

St John's Day

24 June 2022

Collegiate identity for all who serve in St John
Ambulance

John Pearn



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St John Ambulance Australia

Office of the Senior Paediatrician

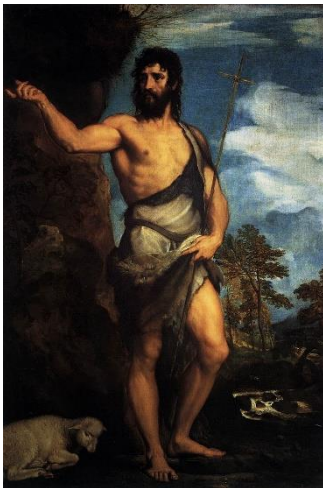
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On 24 June each year, members of the international family of St John come together to share the values which enjoin us all.

Many different religions within Christendom commemorate this special day. There are several St John's Days. The family of *The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem*, "our" Order and family of St John Ambulance, commemorates the Day of St John the Baptist, whose name was given by Benedictine monks to a Hospice and later Hospital in Jerusalem in the 11th century A.D. From that time, the tradition of "muscular Christianity" has evolved, with an emphasis on secular healthcare in the pre-hospital domain. Another St John's Day is celebrated on 27 December each year, honouring his St John the Evangelist (also called St John the Divine), one of Christ's twelve apostles.



"Our" St John's Day, 24 June each year, commemorates St John the Baptist, a cousin of Christ, who was martyred in or around the year 29 of our calendar. St John's Day, commemorated on 24 June each year, commemorates the supposed day of his birth, not his death which legend has it was on 29 August.

St John the Baptist in the Wilderness, by Titian.

Historians believe that the commemoration of St John on 24 June each year was an appropriation, by the early Christian church in the third and fourth centuries AD, of the celebrations of Midsummer Day, 21 June, held annually throughout Europe and northern Asia. On the occasion of the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year, religious ceremonies, rites and other celebrations were held. On that day, bonfires were lit, rites were performed and festivals were held to acknowledge the significance of this special day in the annual cycle of the seasons.

Since pre-literate times, one of the rites was the collection of medicinal herbs on that special day of the Summer Solstice. In the Christian era, St John's wort (*Hypericum* sp.) was collected with the belief that its acknowledged medicinal properties would be further enhanced by its association with the Saint.

St John the Baptist was the son of Elizabeth and Zachariah, a Jewish priest. The Nativity of St John the Baptist, as a celebrated sacred day in the Christian Calendar, was well-established by 506 A.D., being listed in documents at the Council of Agde, as one of Christendom's principal festivals. (The Council of Agde was held in Languedoc in France, and amongst other things forbade bishops to sell slaves, apparently a common but decidedly un-Christian practice prior to that time).

In the 21st century, all members of St John Ambulance throughout the British Commonwealth of Nations, Hong Kong, the Republic of Ireland and the United States of America affirm, if not in any formal way, but certainly in spirit, our mission "to prevent and relieve sickness and injury and to act to enhance the health and well-being of people anywhere in the world."

In this particular year, 2022, we acknowledge particularly the work of the St John Eye Hospital Group, and the dedicated staff from so many walks of life who serve in the St John Eye Hospital in Jerusalem, and its outreach clinics particularly those in Gaza. We think also of all those who serve, with great courage in the face of mortal risk, in providing first aid, ambulance transport, resuscitation and medical and surgical care to those in the Ukraine, at this time of such appalling atrocities.

May the spirit of St John Ambulance reach out to them; and may the work of St John Ambulance – both in preventive medicine and in the promotion of safety, and in the treatment support of those who are sick and injured in the prehospital domain – continue to be a source of pride and fulfilment of all those who serve in the name of St John.



The Baptism of Jesus by St John The Baptist.

From an Armenian evangelistary, 1587.

Courtesy of *Thickstock*, with acknowledgements.