Holy Fire 'miracle' in Jerusalem church where Jesus was resurrected (VIDEO, PHOTOS)

Get short URL

Thousands of Orthodox Christian braved hours of waiting to witness the Holy Fire ceremony in Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre – an important annual rite for the Church's eastern denominations.

In what believers regard as a miracle, every year the day before Orthodox Easter, an unlit blue fire from a stone in the Church descends from the dome and ignites a candle held by the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem.

Around 10,000 people squeezed into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – regarded by many as the place where Jesus was laid to rest and resurrected – with about as many waiting outside.

As the Patriarch received the fire, he passed it around, to other clergymen from other denominations (six of them share the church and consider it a holy site) and onto the gathered pilgrims.

The appearance of the flame is symbolic of Jesus' rise from the dead three days after his funeral.

Christian Orthodox worshippers hold up candles lit from the 'Holy Fire' as thousands gather in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's old city on May 4, 2013.(AFP Photo / Gali Tibbon)

Pilgrims let the flames touch their hands – as the Holy Fire supposedly does not burn those who come in contact with it.

Those outside watched the ceremony on giant broadcast screens.

Candles lit by the Holy Fire were then taken to Nazareth, where Jesus was born, and to the home countries of the assembled clergymen. There are around 300 million Orthodox Christians in the world.

The Holy Fire phenomenon was first witnessed in the 9th century, and has been one of the longest-running Orthodox traditions. In the past other Christian denominations, including Roman Catholics, have dismissed the rite as a fraud, although this year, a Catholic clergyman took part in the ceremony in a show of Ecumenical unity.

A Christian Orthodox worshipper holds up candles lit from the 'Holy Fire' as thousands gather in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's old city on May 4, 2013.(AFP Photo / Gali Tibbon)

Christian Orthodox worshippers hold up candles lit from the 'Holy Fire' as thousands gather in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's old city on May 4, 2013.(AFP Photo / Gali Tibbon)

Christian Orthodox worshippers hold their hands up as a ray of light comes through a skylight in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's old city on May 4, 2013.(AFP Photo / Gali Tibbon)

orshippers hold candles as they take part in the Christian Orthodox Holy Fire ceremony at the Church

of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's Old city May 4, 2013.(Reuters / Ammar Awad)