



# INTRODUCTION: HOLY FIRE

**T**HROUGH DIFFERENT OBSERVANCES and ceremonies, Christians around the world express their faith that their Redeemer lives. Such beliefs are seen vividly in the Holy Land, where Christians of many varieties live and where many more come as pilgrims to visit locations where the sacred events of Jesus' life took place.

One of the most remarkable and memorable Easter observances is the celebration of the "Miracle of the Holy Fire," which takes place in Jerusalem on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter in the Orthodox Christian calendar. This extraordinary celebration of the Resurrection is observed in Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity but not in Western (Catholic/Protestant) churches. It has been documented for well over a thousand years. It is a unique practice in the world—it takes place only in the Holy City, yet it is loved throughout all of

Eastern Christianity and is even broadcast live in some Orthodox countries.

The Greek Orthodox patriarch presides over the ceremony, assisted by bishops of the Armenian and Syriac Orthodox Churches and others. The setting is the Church of the Resurrection, known to Western Christians as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the traditional site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Inside the church, the patriarch enters alone into the small, dark structure identified as the tomb of Jesus. Multitudes who have crowded inside the church wait, holding unlit candles in their hands. Eventually, a flash of fire is seen inside the tomb, and within a moment, the patriarch emerges, holding a bundle of burning candles.

From his burning candles, the Holy Fire spreads rapidly to candles in the hands of thousands of worshipers inside the great church. From there, the flame spreads outside the building to thousands more along the streets of Jerusalem's Old City. And then the flame is transported to distant lands as the celebration continues well beyond Jesus' tomb. Thus the fire that comes from the place of Jesus' triumph over darkness spreads light all over the world.

Throughout the year, our thoughts are directed toward our Savior. He is "the light of the world." Those who follow him "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). Like the flame that emerges from the empty tomb, Jesus emerged on that Easter morning to bring light to all people in all nations. We rejoice in that light.

The essays published in this book were delivered at annual Brigham Young University Easter Conferences in 2010 and 2011. We thank those who accepted our invitations to share their feelings, insights, and testimonies about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We hope that this small volume will add to your testimony that our Redeemer lives and that his saving light continues to illuminate our lives.

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