

THE BETHLEHEM PEACELIGHT '2008-09
Light of Peace and Friendship
From hand to hand, bringing the Christmas light to every home!

The end of December is approaching and the Bethlehem Peace Light will once again be arriving in Russia. Preparations commenced in good time and the event committee, composed of coordinators, rovers and scoutmasters from various organizations, are working on the final details of the Bethlehem Peace Light 2008-'09.

Every year the event gains in popularity and attendance, and becomes geographically more and more widespread. A few years ago the light was passed on up into the Arctic Circle and further into the Urals, we strive to repeat this. Thousands of believers and scouts of all ages will be passing on a small part of the sacred flame from one to another incarnating peace and goodwill on Christmas Eve.

This year, working in conjunction with our partner "Ruskaya Avtobusnaya Liniya" (Russian Coach Lines) and with their help, we are hoping to improve the technical feasibility of the event, by putting to use their wide experience of urban and interregional transportation.

The Bethlehem Light of Peace and Friendship is an international event which involves European and Russian scouts. By means of a distinctive relay, the flame, which is lit from ever-burning lamps in the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, is carried all over Europe in special lanterns. For already more than 20 years now, the Bethlehem Peace Light has been passed on by hand from church to church, from scout headquarters to the homely lamps of believers throughout Europe.

In Moscow the Light is brought to one of the churches at the Krutitski Patriarchal Monastery, where a public prayer service is held. The Bethlehem Peace Light is then handed over to scouts who come from other towns such as: Kazan, Kemerovo, Kostroma, Kursk, Murmansk, Nijni-Novgorod, Petrozavodsk and Smolensk, and from them it reaches orthodox, catholic and other Christian churches in many cities, towns and villages throughout the country.

How the event came about

"The Bethlehem Peace Light" originated in 1986, when Austrian state television channel ORF first organized an event in support of Children-in-need called 'Light into Darkness'. The present day name of the event was acquired in 1989, when Austrian scouts decided to join in. The event then became international. Over the last few years the event has covered practically all European countries. The Bethlehem Peace Light first came to Russia more than 10 years ago in the middle of the 90's.

The idea behind the event

The Bethlehem Peace Light is an example of the spirit of scouting and of scouts serving others. For many believers, bringing a part of this flame into their houses will bring in a light of good will and comfort, hope and love, peace and friendship. For the scouts carrying out the event, the Bethlehem Peace Light represents the whole idea of the brotherhood of scouting as it brings together not only scouts from different organisations and regions in Russia, but also from various countries for the same common and noble deed. Participants in the event who directly transport the Light to far away corners of Russia receive the title of 'Guardian of the Light'.

Technical organization of the event

The flame of the Bethlehem Peace Light is lit from ever-burning lanterns in the grotto of the Orthodox Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem during a ceremonial service in the presence of clergymen from all Christian denominations. Lamps containing the Bethlehem Peace Light are then flown out under the organization of the Austrian television channel ORF, the founders of the event, and delivered to Vienna. It

is from there that the Light begins its journey throughout Europe and to America transported in scout hurricane lanterns.

It has become custom for Russian scouts to receive the Bethlehem Peace Light from Polish Harcer Scouts or from their fellow Belarusian scout brothers. For several years now the flame has been delivered to Russia before the 24th December, so that the Light may be handed to all fellow Christians in time for their Christmas.

Upon arrival of the Bethlehem Peace Light in Moscow, a festive prayer service is held at the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Krutitski Patriarchal Monastery. After which, lamps holding the Bethlehem Peace Light will be kept burning in churches and scout meeting halls until orthodox Epiphany, so that all those who wish to, may collect the flame for orthodox Christmas Eve and during the whole of the Christmas week.

We are well practised in handling such an unusual object and how to pass it on over long distances. We are prepared to share the secrets of this process.

How the church takes part

In Russia the event is carried out with the participation of the synodal youth department of the Moscow Patriarchy. The head of the department, the Archbishop of Kostroma and Galicheski Alexander, blesses the ceremonial prayer service when the flame is greeted. And similarly throughout Russia, where the event is carried out, the relative diocesan clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church hold blessing ceremonies.

As the 'Bethlehem Peace Light' represents a general scouting event, Russian scouts also deliver the flame to the corresponding churches in Moscow and in other towns in Russia where there are Catholic and other Christian parishes, on Western style Christmas Eve.

Event participants

Russian Union of Scouts (RUS),
Moscow Circle of Rovers,
The Organization "Scouts of Moscow",
The Brotherhood of Orthodox Pathfinders (BPS).

The ceremonial prayer service welcoming the arrival of the flame in Moscow will be held at the Krutitski Patriarchal Monastery at the following address:

11 Krutitskaya Ulica (Крутицкое Патриаршее подворье)
Metro "Proletarskaya" (Крутицкая улица, дом 11)
On 21st December, at approximately 11:30am (please ask for confirmation).

Event Coordinators:

- Slava E. Chernyh, Scoutmaster slava.chernykh@gmail.com + 7 903 793 6997
- Helen O'Connell - Gros helen.oconnellgros@gmail.com
- Katerina Yudina www.bps.moskva@rambler.ru

More information on www.scoutmaster.ru