

# Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church  
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES

No 632 February 2014

## Pulpit Diary

### Feb 1 Saturday

4.00pm Families at Four (Messy Church)

### Feb 2

9.30am First Sunday Service led by  
Kirk Session

10.30am Morning Worship

### Feb 7 Friday

9.15am Pram Praise

### Feb 9

10.30am Morning Worship led by  
Uniformed Organisations

### Feb 16

10.30am Morning Worship

### Feb 23

10.30am Morning Worship

### Feb 28 Friday

7.30pm Pre-communion Service

### Mar 2

9.00 am Communion

10.30am Communion (Crèche, Spectrum  
and Springboard meet as usual)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

For information about church organisations,  
please contact the Church Office (Mon–Fri,  
9.00am–12.00 noon, 1.30pm–3.30pm):  
Mrs Virginia Johnston

tel and fax: 0131 447 9969

e-mail: [greenbankchurch@btconnect.com](mailto:greenbankchurch@btconnect.com)

The pastoral team can be contacted through the  
Church Office:

Rev Alison Swindells

tel and fax: 0131 447 4032

email: [alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk)

Rev W. Peter Graham

tel: 0131 445 5763

Youth Minister: Rev Bill Stone

tel: 07883 815 598

email: [billstoneiii@gmail.com](mailto:billstoneiii@gmail.com)

To make contact with any of the organisations  
described in this *Leaflet*, please use the  
telephone number given, if there is one.  
Otherwise please contact the Church Office.

Website: [www.greenbankchurch.org](http://www.greenbankchurch.org)

## Minister's Letter

### Dear Friends

Last week Sean and I happened to be driving through the centre of Perth. It was not a deliberate decision – we were travelling north and decided to pay a visit to a particular outdoor store on the way. We knew this store was on the outskirts



of the city but were not quite sure where so we switched on the sat nav. Much to our surprise we found ourselves right in the heart of the city – the computer must have picked up the most direct route to our destination – even if it was not the most straightforward.

Fortunately it was not rush hour! But there were still a number of sets of traffic lights to be negotiated! And whilst Perth is not a big city we were a bit unsure of where we were going. Sitting at one set of red lights our attention was captured by a huge poster on a wall opposite proclaiming loudly and clearly to any like us, “Without Jesus you are lost!”

Unfortunately I could not see any obvious indication of who had put up that poster. And at that point the lights changed. So the road reclaimed my attention. But I could not quite put that poster out of my mind. Perhaps because while I could see the funny side I also thought its tenor was a bit threatening and off-putting. I would have been happier had it read “Without Jesus *we* are lost!”

That may seem a small change and yet it is one that makes a huge difference. For that poster would then become a reminder of the significance of the incarnation for the whole world. Each

year the Church is encouraged to focus on a different Gospel so that we become familiar with the different insights and emphases of the various Gospel writers into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This year Matthew's Gospel

is the predominant one. From the outset Matthew uses various literary and religious devices to show Jesus as Emmanuel, God-with-us.

But Matthew's Gospel was also first written to a small group of people, who lived in a world where abuse of power, brutality and poverty were very much in evidence. And it was written to remind them of the wisdom of the values of God's Kingdom, and to encourage them to live by these values. There is much in this Gospel that speaks to us today. And anyone seeking to take the Christian faith seriously, anyone attempting to live by God's values of love and compassion and justice, knows just how lost we can become and how much we all need the help of Jesus, Emmanuel, the one who is God-with-us every day. To use the language of another Gospel, Jesus is the light, the life, the way and the truth. 2014 will no doubt bring its fair share of challenges, but as each of us seeks to live within God's purposes I pray that those kingdom values of love, justice and compassion may be visible in our common life as a congregation, a community and a nation.

With warmest wishes

**Alison I Swindells**  
Minister

## Christmas Event for Children at Greenbank

No photographs were taken at this year's Christmas Event, not because there weren't any good photos to be taken but simply because we were all too busy having a good time to remember to take photos!

Once again it was very well attended with 70 children aged 5 to 11 crowding into the church halls at 1.30pm on a cold December afternoon, ready to start the activities and to join other children of their own age in groups led by members of the congregation.

As a starter activity everyone was given a large Christmas stocking to decorate with their names and Christmas stickers. Luckily someone had spent the morning sorting out the letters to make sure each team had the right letters for every name. No time to be too fussy because soon everyone had to be shepherded into the church for the first part of the Christmas Story on the big screen. Parts of the story were quite scary but the children were good at making sure the adults sitting beside them didn't get too frightened.

Now it was time for games with big children in the Main Hall having loud fun with a game that involved them running round the hall with a balloon tied to their ankles trying to burst other people's balloons while protecting their own. (So that's why John Muri-son needed a balloon pump! It takes a lot of puff to blow up 40 balloons without a pump!) Downstairs the younger children were playing their games including a relay race that involved large Christmas stockings, spoons and huge amounts of pasta (uncooked). Luckily QII and Springboard helpers were on board to clear up the mess.

After a break to calm down, have a carton of juice and eat delicious cupcakes it was back into the church to continue the Christmas story.

Back in their small groups it was time for making things to put in the Christmas stockings – gingerbread men biscuits turned upside down and decorated to become reindeer, Christmas tree decorations fashionably decorated with shiny buttons and sequins, in some cases masses of sequins (more clearing up for Springboard and QII), and snow globes. Actually nobody had time to make a snow globe (they were taken home) because it was time to go to the church again for the final part of the Christmas story with Alison and Bill.

With twenty minutes to go we were all quietly gathered round the Christmas tree in the Centenary Hall singing carols and eating ice cream. Now was the time to take photos surely, but no, we were all too busy enjoying the magic of the moment before the parents arrived and it was all over.

Until next year!

## No Such Thing as a Perfect Parent

We are running a short **Parenting Course**, for the parents of 10-17 year olds, for a period of five weeks starting on 24th February.

We are aware that many parents can feel isolated and that only they are experiencing whatever the current issue is with their child. Somewhere to get together and chat things over is often just what is needed.

The course is for any parent, single parents or couples, expectant parents or step parents – all are equally welcome and no connection with Greenbank Church is necessary. Everyone will be made welcome.

Each session has two short DVD inputs raising issues. The emphasis will be on providing space and time for parents to share their experiences in discussion with others. The meetings will be at 7.30pm on **24th February, 3rd and 10th March**, and then on **24th and 31st March**.

When I read over the course materials the very first sentence said, "There is no such thing as a perfect parent." That was reassuring!!

If you would like to join in, or want more information about the course, please email me.

Janet Allan

Email [janetallan1949@gmail.com](mailto:janetallan1949@gmail.com)

## Christmas Sing-along

Thanks to everyone who attended this lively event (were *you* wearing a Twelve Days of Christmas hat?). Thanks particularly to Buckstone and Firhill choirs, and to Firhill Jazz Band, who kept us tapping our feet and helped us to sing along; also to our readers and to soloist Lucas Watson for an inspiring moment of reflection.

Scottish Love in Action would like to thank the Guild for so generously raising funds once again through their marvellous home baking and preserves stall, and Goretta Correa of Ninabella's kind contribution from selling some of her lovely range of unusual gifts which were available for purchase during refreshments after the singing.

Don't miss this fun event next Christmas!

Gillie Davidson

## Books Wanted

Contributions of books are still welcome for the **Book Café in aid of SLA** to be held on 22nd February: Children's, Adult, Fiction, non-Fiction – in good condition please. Contact Hazel Macaulay and leave details. We will collect.

Email [hazelmacaulay@hotmail.com](mailto:hazelmacaulay@hotmail.com)

## Edinburgh Street Pastors

The Guild had a fascinating meeting learning about Edinburgh Street Pastors. Since 2009 the volunteer Pastors have been out and about in the Greenside Area of Edinburgh on Friday evenings from 10pm until 3am or 4am. The Pastors wear a clear uniform and offer help and support to those sleeping on the street and also those out for the night. Practical help includes a fleecy blanket, flip-flops and water. Their assistance is welcomed by the council and police and the speakers gave examples of where they had been able to help.

The Pastors would like to be out on Saturday nights as well but this means recruiting and training more volunteers. Age is not a barrier – one of the volunteers who spoke is over 70!

More information is available at

<http://edinburgh.streetpastors.org.uk/>

Gillian Sweetman  
Mission and Service

## Ladies Cinema Night

Scottish Love in Action (SLA) are hosting their next Ladies Cinema Night on **Thursday 27th March 2014 (7.30pm for 8.00pm)**. Come and enjoy a night out with your girlfriends and watch the epic musical *Les Misérables* on the big screen. Your viewing will be in the Edinburgh Dominion's Gold Class seats with fizz, French-themed canapés and a free raffle. Tickets are £20 per person. A double set of tickets in Gold Class seats with one bottle of fizz, canapés and raffle is available for £40, and a triple set of tickets in Gold Class seats with two bottles of fizz between three and free raffle is available for £60. Tickets are on sale now on the SLA website, [www.sla-india.org](http://www.sla-india.org). For more information call the SLA Office (Tel 629 9112).



## Christian Aid Collection 2014

### Christian Aid Week 11th–17th May 2014

Christian Aid continues to be well supported at Greenbank but we need to sustain this momentum as our thoughts turn to this year's house to house collection in May.

Last year's total for the house-to-house collection amounted to £3,500 (approx.); 24% of envelopes were also gift aided which is an improved rate from 2012 and helps to give an additional amount for Christian Aid over and above what was put into the envelopes. I was very grateful for all the support and help you gave me in the preparations and carrying-out of the collection.

Although Christian Aid week seems some time away, preparation work is starting now and, as always, we need a team of collectors to cover all the streets in the parish. Thank you again to those who collected last year and I hope that most of you will be able to collect again this year. I shall be contacting you over the next few weeks but for anyone who is thinking of retiring I would be glad if you could "ask a friend" to take over your houses, preferably before I speak to you!

Inevitably I will need some new collectors to share the load. Please contact me if you would like to play a part in this important mission.

It always seems a bit daunting to take a collection on for the first time but believe me everyone actually enjoys the experience, which makes new connections in the community and boosts our presence on a wider front in Greenbank. It takes up to about an hour to deliver the envelopes and about 3 hours collection time through the week. Most people do this over two early evening slots and sometimes couples take on an area between them.

I am also looking for administrative help nearer the time to assist me preparing the envelopes for collectors and also for counting up at the end.

Last year we had a follow-up 'party' to share our experiences and as a thank you for helping out – a massive additional incentive!

**Pam Jack**  
Email [pamelajacko6@gmail.com](mailto:pamelajacko6@gmail.com)

## Congregational Board Notes

At its December meeting the Board was briefed on recent work which had been undertaken on Church property, on progress with Health & Safety issues and on the latest position as regards finance. In respect of property it was reported that the Kitchen upgrade project was close to completion and that it would be completed within budget. Arrangements were in hand to sand and re-varnish the Main Hall floor. Arrangements were also in hand to undertake some necessary repairs to the Church roof.

In respect of Health & Safety, improvements had been made to the fire alarm arrangements. Draft policies had been completed covering a number of Health & Safety topics. These would be discussed by appropriate office-bearers. Other policies covering Food Safety, Kitchen Use and Lone Working would require to be cascaded to Church organisations.

With regard to finance it was reported that the forecast for the year to December showed a deficit which was smaller than expected but was still substantial. The budget for 2014 had been agreed and, again, a deficit was forecast. The question of how to fund future deficits was remitted to the recently formed Stewardship Committee.

## Scout Jumble Sale

### Correction of date

Please note that the date of the Scout Jumble Sale is **12th April 2014**, not 5th April as stated in the Provisional Programme.

# Families at Four

Greenbank's



## Saturday 1 February

### 4:00pm-6:00pm

### at Greenbank Parish Church

The event is for children from three and up with their families. Friends, brothers and sisters are welcome. Children must bring an adult with them. Families at Four is free, and even includes dinner for everyone! Donations are welcome.

### We look forward to seeing you!

To register for Messy Church, visit the Church website at [greenbankchurch.org](http://greenbankchurch.org) or contact the Church Office (Tel 447 9969).



February Issue of *Life and Work***'A Big Family'**

*Heart for Art*, an innovative CrossReach project which is helping people with dementia express themselves through art.

**A Helping Hand**

The new Church of Scotland Youth Guide to Ethical Living.

**Open My Ears, That I May Hear**

A personal plea for worship leaders to consider people with hearing disabilities.

**A Great Journey**

The Church's Head of Stewardship says attitude can make the difference in stewardship campaigns.

**Scotland's People on the Record**

A taste of the old parish records, now available online.

**Hands Across the World**

Previewing *Heart and Soul 2014*.

**Being There for People**

The Moderator asks 'what is the purpose of the Church of Scotland?'

**Acts and Actions**

The Rev Dr Martin Fair urges us to follow the example of the early Christians.

**Saying Goodbye**

Ruth Burgess discusses how to make funerals meaningful to non-churchgoers.

**Plus** news, letters, reviews and crosswords, all for just £2.

**Online:** Visit [www.lifeandwork.org](http://www.lifeandwork.org) for the latest news and exclusive features.

## Book Review

### *The Illustrated Screwtape Letters Letters from a Senior to a Junior Devil*

by C. S. Lewis

ISBN 978-0-00-727355-3

Harper 2008 (First published 1942) £9.99

The advice to the Junior Devil is clear: "the only thing that matters is that you separate the man from the Enemy". Screwtape, an elderly retired devil with the rank of an Abysmal Sublimity Under Secretary, is writing to a young devil, Wormwood, who has started work on his first "patient". Screwtape is a fully rounded character, at times suavely insidious, at other times angry at the mistakes of his young colleague. Screwtape finds that the patient has become friendly with a young Christian girl. There is a risk that he will every day get to know more Christians. "Not only a Christian", writes Screwtape, "but such a Christian – a vile, sneaking, simpering, demure [and six other epithets] miss." In his advice Screwtape deals with a wide range of aspects of the life of the Christian. On the "painful subject of prayer" he suggests that the patient should be kept praying "to the thing he has made, not to the Person who made him". Screwtape discusses the four types of laughter Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper and Flippancy; get the patient to avoid the laughter of fun (because it produces charity and contentment); encourage flippancy because it deadens the intellect and "builds up around a man the finest armour-plate against the Enemy that I know."

This remarkable book was published in 1942 and has been re-published with gleeful drawings by William Papas. Writing in 1960, C.S. Lewis said that some readers supposed that the *letters* were the ripe fruit of many years' study in theology. They forgot, he said, that there is an equally reliable, though less creditable, way of learning how temptation works. "My heart .... sheweth me the wickedness of the ungodly."

Roger Bland

### **Fundraiser for the Julius Project**

**Concert in Greenbank Church  
on Tuesday 18th February at 7.30pm**

**with the Senior  
Southern Light Singers**

**Refreshments afterwards  
in the Lower Hall**

**Tickets £8 available from  
Guild committee members**

***The Julius Project aims to help  
over 80 people each year find  
their way out of homelessness***

## Guild Work Party

Those who saw our display will know that we have had another busy and productive year. Over 150 knitted items were given to the following charities: *Children 1st*; *Simpsons Neonatal*; *the Edinburgh Clothing Store*; *EMMS*; and *Help the Homeless*.

The EMMS are no longer going to send clothing to Malawi, partly due to increased transport costs, but partly because of the success of their projects to teach local women to knit, a project to which we contributed knitting pins.

We contacted the Edinburgh Clothing Store and a lady came to see what we had knitted, and happily went away with two sackfuls of jumpers. We now know exactly what they can use and shall continue to knit for them this year.

Finally our thanks to the kind members who have contributed beautiful wool and to those who have knitted squares.

Remember we would warmly welcome new members. Meetings are fortnightly at 2.30pm in the Hermitage Room, from Thursday 6th February.

Anne Oxbrow



## Church Library

Huge thanks to Isobel Thom and her Sunday Coffee team for giving us the money to purchase a new mobile book case for the adult books.

As you know, the Church Library and Resource Centre is situated in the Pentland Room but during the past year it became evident that people were unable to access the books because the Pentland Room is used for lots of different things. So having a mobile book case means that once again the books can come to you. They will be wheeled through every Sunday and you can browse through them at coffee time.

We are very lucky to have the complete new series by Tom Wright. You can see the titles on the top shelf of the new book case. Tom Wright writes in an approachable and sometimes anecdotal style. He talks about John's gospel, for example, as "one of the great books in the literature of the world and part of its greatness is the way it reveals its secrets not just to high flown learning but to those who come to it with humility and hope". I think you may find these books a fitting successor to Willie Barclay's which have been borrowed frequently over the years.

You may remember we contributed to Richmond Hope, the organisation which helps children who have suffered the loss of someone dear to them? I have several books recommended by them which you may like to borrow if it helps a child who has experienced a sad loss, a difficult situation or is learning to cope with loneliness or maybe even a special needs child in the family. And I do know many of you wonder which books to buy at Christmas and birthdays for your own or other people's children. Two different publications will be available from now on to help you with this. The *Letterbox Library* calls itself a "not for profit social enterprise committed to celebrating equality and diversity in the very best children's books". Their catalogues are well worth a look.

In addition the children's book magazine *Carousel* carries recommendations of children's books covering all ages and by many varied and good quality writers.

The children's books are popular on Sunday mornings. Among the Bible stories (I put *Noah's Ark* out this week to reflect the weather!) there are other stories to be recommended. Among them Shirley Hughes' book *The Lion and the Unicorn* about a child who is evacuated (during the War) to a country district where the host family are not sympathetic to his homesickness and who do not understand his need to do without pork in his diet as he is Jewish. The resolution of the story is happy and the reading child hopefully reassured that good can come out of a difficult situation.

In addition there are some new children's books. Following the popularity of *All Kinds of Beliefs* and *All Kinds of People* here is a new one called *All Kinds of Homes*. Like the others this is a 'lift the flap book' and hopefully will entertain (and educate) after a busy time at Spectrum.

A new copy of *Room on the Broom* has been acquired as the previous one was a bit worn. Julia Donaldson's rhyming story and humour will be welcomed by the children and possibly their parents. And *The Animal Boogie*. An entertaining story about all the animals in the jungle should be a hit!

I hope very much you will enjoy the new books and the availability of the books, and I look forward to seeing you all there next Sunday!

Moira Small







## **Wanted – more good quality household goods for Fresh Start**

There is a particular need for small electrical appliances (not TVs). Many thanks to those who continue to give so generously to Fresh Start. I would like to encourage others to get involved. Donated goods for the Fresh Start Starter Packs were reduced in quantity in January, as opposed to the previous collection date, and this is a concern.

**Dates for your Diary:** Next dates for Fresh Start are **23rd February** and **30th March 2014**, at the Sunday service (table in Main Hall).

### **Full list of items needed**

#### **Dishes and Crockery**

Dinner plates, side plates, bowls, cutlery, mugs, glass tumblers, tea-towels.

#### **Pots and Pans etc.**

Pots with lids, milk pans, frying pans, plastic boxes, cooking utensils, can openers, potato peelers, wooden spoons.

#### **Cleaning Things**

Washing up basins, washing-up liquid, toilet cleaner, toilet rolls, hand soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, dust pans and brushes, pedal bin liners, rubbish bags, all purpose cleaner, laundry tablets.

#### **Bed Linen and Towels**

Single flat sheets, double flat sheets, single duvet covers, double duvet covers, pillow cases, blankets, duvets, bed covers, towels, face cloths, bath mats, curtains, rugs.

#### **Small Household Electrical items (not TVs)**

Pick up a leaflet on a Fresh Start Sunday, see [www.freshstartweb.org.uk](http://www.freshstartweb.org.uk) or telephone 476 7741, to find out more about Fresh Start.

Alison Ambler

## **The Guild**

First of all very many thanks to those of you who helped us raise £340 for SLA by contributing to our Produce Stall at the Big Sing-along and the Sunday after. We had an amazing assortment of jams, jellies, marmalade and chutneys along with lovely cakes and biscuits.

We began the New Year with a Coffee Morning and now we are thinking about our meeting on 21st January which features a talk called *Parables for Today* by the Rev Tom Gordon. On 4th February the Rev John Cameron will tell us about *Other People's Houses*. Our annual fund raising event for the Guild Project is on **18th February**: this year it is *The Julius Project*, which is involved in befriending and helping people who have been homeless and have just been allocated housing. This can be a lonely and sometimes frightening time if you have nobody to talk to about it and to offer you advice. The Julius Project is training and supporting volunteers who are giving their time to help.

The Senior Southern Light Singers are coming to give us a concert which this year will be in the church, with refreshments in the downstairs hall. The concert begins at 7.30pm and tickets, price £8, are available from members of the Guild committee. We do hope that many of you will come and join us and help us raise lots of money for this very worthy cause.

Ann Pirie

# **BOOK CAFE**

for Scottish Love in Action

[www.sla-india.org](http://www.sla-india.org)

**Come along and browse through the books for sale ....**

**Enjoy a bowl of soup .....**

**Coffee/tea too!**

**Sat 22nd Feb 11am–2pm in  
Greenbank Church**



**TICKETS £5**

**includes a bowl of SOUP + 2 BOOKS**

**For tickets apply to  
Church Office Tel 447 9969**

**CHILD + ADULT BOOKS  
FICTION + NON FICTION**

## **Friendship Club**

At our Christmas Party we were entertained with some fabulous stories and songs by Noel de Jongh, followed in January by talks on life in Myanmar now, the magic of colour and Kathleen's musical choices, all with connections to our city.

On 12th February we are going to relax as we watch the beautiful story of 'Quartet'. On the 19th Kathleen will give us 'Voices' and on the 26th we will be taking a walk in the Botanical Gardens with Jane Freshwater.

Val Smart

Material for the March *Leaflet* should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by Sunday 9th February, or sent by e-mail by 9am on Tuesday 11th February to [greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com](mailto:greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com)

# Congregational Register

*Omitted from on-line version*

## Coffee Rota

### February

- 2 Lennie & Katy Maguire D20 & D19
- 9 Monday House Group
- 16 John & Alison Murison D60 & D62
- 23 BAGs

### March

- 2 Communion (*no coffee*)



## Crèche Rota

### February

- 2 Carrie Reid
- 9 Vivien Hutchison
- 16 Alison Ambler
- 23 Lorna Htet-Khin

### March

- 2 Hazel McLachlan



## Flower Rota

	<i>Provided by</i>	<i>Delivered by</i>
<b>February</b>		
2	Christine Willis	Janet Edwards
9	Janet McAinsh	Katy Maguire
16	Ishbel Emery	Caroline Kehoe
23	Jean Dely	Helen Aitken
<b>March</b>		
2	Isobel Aitchison	Fiona Connal



## Welcome Teams

### February

- 2 **Rosemary McCulloch**, Rona Ferguson, Fiona Grant, Christina Morrow, Alison Murison, Malcolm Reid, Joan Ritchie, Toby Tucker, Alastair Ross
- 9 **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones, Ian McWilliam
- 16 **John George**, Rhian Ferguson, Alastair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Jill Powlett-Brown, Dorothy Whitehead, Tony Foster
- 23 **Alan Armit**, Edith Armit, Louise Coghill, Iain Davidson, Hugh Cowan, Susan Black, Malcolm Watters, Nora Kellock, Elizabeth Mackay

### March

- 2 **John Ritchie**, Eric Brown, Stewart Coghill, Ralph Davidson, Susan Inch, Gill Sweetman, Ian Thomson, David Easton, Susan Jackman

## World Day of Prayer

### *Friday 7th March 2014*

“Where two or three are gathered together in my name... there I will be also.” **Will you join us?**

Every year on the first Friday in March, Christians around the world of all ages gather in small groups and large congregations to use the same basic form of worship, written by women of a different country each year on a theme chosen by the World Day of Prayer International Committee. This year the service is on **Friday 7th March** and a service will be held in **Greenbank Parish Church at 10.30am**. This service has been prepared by the women of Egypt and has the title *Streams in the Desert*. In the service we think about water, which is essential for all life.

There are two bible studies in preparation for the service, which are held in 121 George Street at 10.30am. The dates for these are **Friday 31st January** and **Friday 14th February**.

Everyone is very welcome to come to the bible studies and especially to the service itself on **Friday 7th March 2014**.

**Margaret Barrowman**

## Some prayers of the Old Testament

**Raiders of the Lost Ark, first screened in cinemas in 1981 and repeated (frequently) on television ever since, introduces the character of Dr Indiana Jones.** In this first adventure movie, set in 1936, the seemingly staid American college professor of archaeology is caught up in an action-packed race with the Nazis to find the lost Ark of the Covenant, which the mystically-minded Hitler believes will make his cause invincible. Although there is no evidence of Hitler ever having had any interest in the Ark, the movie does an admirable job of capturing the mystique of one of the world's most ancient unsolved mysteries.

**The Ark is the Bible's Ark of the Covenant.** This was a gold-plated wooden chest first constructed by the Israelites to hold the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. It became the sign of God's presence and protection. During their wanderings in the wilderness the Israelites carried the Ark with them, keeping it in a special tent, a constant reminder that God is not static, unchangeable, immovable and unmoved, but is a God of journeys, travelling with his people through time and countries. When they settled in Canaan, the Ark was kept in various places until the reign of David.

**After uniting the tribes of Israel and Judah as one nation, King David chose Jerusalem as his capital.** To establish Jerusalem as the religious centre of the nation he brought the Ark of the Covenant from where it had been kept and installed it with splendid ceremony in the capital. Instead of keeping the Ark in a tent, David wanted to build a temple to house it and consulted Nathan the prophet. Nathan replied to David to the effect that God did not want a temple; that a tent would do very well; and that in any case what was important was not what a man might build but his name, his reputation, a life well-lived and remembered through the generations. Nathan assured David that although he would not build a house for God, God would build a house for him, a dynasty that would enjoy the everlasting favour of the Lord.

**David was very much a man of his times.** He could be exceedingly brutal, lustful, cunning, spiteful and calculating. He could also be resourceful, loyal and brave. Above all, he could be described as *a man after God's own heart*. This was not because of divine indifference to his faults and failings nor was it intended as a description of his personal piety. Rather David was regarded as enjoying divine favour because of his role in securing peace in what had been a very troubled region for at least two centuries, in establishing a nation in which justice and security could flourish and in promoting the worship of the one true Lord God of Israel. That was why when David proposed building a "house" for God, in the form of a temple, God promised to build a "house" for David in the form of a royal dynasty.

**David was grateful for the assurance of God's promise of support for his family and descendants.** And so he expressed thanksgiving and glory to God. His prayer is all about the Lord God's action and faithfulness, God's extraordinary generosity towards him. David is addressing the incomparable God: *there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you*. David very

shrewdly makes a second statement of incomparability, this time asserting it of God's people: *Who is like your people, like Israel?* For people as for king, all depends on God: all that makes them distinctive from others is ultimately derived from what God has done.

**David then makes a request.** He goes on to ask God to confirm his promise and to bless the house of David that it might continue forever. At its heart David's prayer is simply a request to God that God would confirm for ever the word spoken concerning his servant and concerning his house, and that it would please God to bless the house of David. It is essentially a prayer asking God to keep a promise already made through the prophet Nathan to David and his family.

**Is this then an unnecessary prayer?** Why ask God to keep a promise already given? This prayer recognises the weakness and unimportance of David and his descendants apart from God — *Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?* This is not false modesty on the part of a great man: it acknowledges that the king, important as he is humanly speaking, yet stands in need of the grace of God. To this day the coins in our pockets and purses remind us that our Queen reigns "by the grace of God" (DG stands for the Latin phrase 'Deo gratia'). The role of monarch always carries with it heavy public responsibility. How much greater was this burden of office for David as king of the people of the Lord God!

**Aware not only of his royal duties but also of human weakness, David seeks God's help.** If God's promises are to be kept, God's promises can only be fulfilled through fallible human beings. Even the great King David, the greatest and most successful of Israel's kings, was a mere human, subject to error and pride like others. And yet God chooses to bring about the divine purpose through men and women, imperfect as they are. No priest, Pope, minister, rabbi, monarch or political leader can escape the limitations and temptations that are inevitably part of the human condition. David himself might stray from the way God had in mind for him. And so might his successors in the unknown years ahead. In the light of human weakness it makes excellent sense for David to pray for God's promise to be kept. *And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever.*

**With hindsight we believe that God's promise was kept and exceeded in Jesus.** Christians see David's prayer as the beginning of a process leading from the ancient House of David to God becoming a member of the family of David as Jesus Christ, as great David's greater Son.

### **For further reading**

Many stories about David and his reign can be found in First and Second Books of Samuel in the Bible. His prayer is in 2 Samuel 7, 18-29.