

# Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church  
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES

No 631 December 2013 / January 2014

## Pulpit Diary

### Nov 29 Friday

7.30pm Pre-Communion Service

### Dec 1 First Sunday in Advent

9.00am Communion

10.30am Communion

(Spectrum and Springboard meet as usual)

3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)

### Dec 8 Second Sunday in Advent

10.30am Morning Worship

3.00pm Blue Christmas Service

### Dec 15 Third Sunday in Advent

10.30am All Age Gift Service

(Spectrum and Springboard: end of 1st term)

5.30pm Big Christmas Sing-along  
in aid of SLA

### Dec 22 Fourth Sunday in Advent

10.30am Lessons and Carols

### Dec 24 Christmas Eve

7.00pm All Age Service

11.30pm Watchnight Service  
(Carol singing from 11.10pm)

### Dec 25 Christmas Day

10.30am All Age Service

### Dec 29

10.30am Morning Worship

### 2014

### Jan 5

10.30am Morning Worship

(Spectrum and Springboard: start of 2nd term)

### Jan 12

10.30am Morning Worship

### Jan 19

10.30am Morning Worship

### Jan 26

10.30am Morning Worship

### Feb 2

9.30am First Sunday Service  
led by Kirk Session

10.30am Morning Worship

## Minister's Letter

### Dear Friends

Recently I was privileged to be able to show three classes of Primary 4's from South Morningside Primary School around the Church. They were full of enthusiasm and enjoyed the opportunity of seeing the Church from different perspectives as they



climbed into the pulpit or looked out over the church from the gallery. They had great fun examining the font, lectern and communion table, working out the inscriptions on these, and learning about their purpose and function in Church life. And they were fascinated by the stained glass windows – particularly the one telling the nativity story.

Once a class has toured the Church, I usually sit down with them at the front and let them ask their questions – and there are always plenty of questions. But this time one question in particular took me by surprise. It came at the end of the last class visit. One observant child was asking what the hymn boards were for. When I explained she asked if they could sing a church song. I asked her if she knew any. She shook her head. But then another voice piped up, "Yes you do! We all know 'Away in a Manger.'" And with that the whole class spontaneously burst into the first verse of that Christmas carol, which was lovely, as was their rendition of the 'Big Red Combine Harvester' which followed!

There are times when we want to sing, when our hearts are touched by joy. And so often this is the case at Christmas time. By the time you read this most of you will already know how you will be celebrating

Christmas this year and will be looking forward to a special time with family and friends. But for some Christmas is a very difficult time. The feelings that surround the loss of a loved one, or illness, redundancy, financial worries or loneliness can all be particularly

painful when it seems as if everyone else is celebrating.

That is why this year we are introducing a new "Blue Christmas" service on Sunday 8th December at 3pm. In the midst of all the excitement and festivities this will be a quieter service – an opportunity to reflect on what Christmas has to say to us in the midst of loss and suffering.

Christmas carols hold a special place in the hearts of many people whether they have a church connection or not. Perhaps that is because at their deepest level Christmas carols speak to us in poetry and song of God's amazing love for the world. They tell the story of how in Jesus God laid aside his majesty and entered our world as a poor and vulnerable baby. They remind us once again of how Jesus shared our human life that we might share his risen life. And when we hear that story, and when we allow it to touch our hearts again, then, whether our hearts are full of joy or laden with sorrow, how can we keep from singing?

And so this Christmas and New Year season, if you are celebrating or if for any reason you are not yet able to celebrate, I wish you God's peace and blessing.

With warmest wishes,

**Alison I Swindells**  
Minister

## Congratulations



Congratulations to the Rev Dr John Stevenson on attaining the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

John served as a Parish Minister in Leven, Glasgow and Kirriemuir before becoming General Secretary in the Church of Scotland Department of Education. After his retirement from that post he served the congregation here in Greenbank, assisting with the Christian Education programme.

Since then he has served as locum minister here and in a number of other vacant charges. We give thanks for his years of service and pray for God's blessing on him and his wife Mairi (a member of our Kirk Session) at this time.

AS

## Lent / Easter Appeal 2014

Members of the Congregation are invited to nominate local charities to be recipients of monies raised in next year's Lent/Easter Appeal. Nominations can be sent to me via the Church Office, left for me in the appropriate pigeonhole in the

Main Hall or emailed to [alandfio@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:alandfio@yahoo.co.uk) before Friday 3rd January. Selection of a nominated charity (or charities) will be made at the January meeting of the Congregational Board.

**Alan Ramage**  
Clerk to the Congregational Board

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)



## Food Station opens its doors as Fresh Start expands!

Fresh Start is delighted to announce a new and exciting arm to the charity's services, which has opened with a new office and its own warehouse. *The Food Station*, which is based in the Phoenix Club at Harrison Place near Slateford Road, will deliver a whole range of new or upgraded services to allow the charity to help clients cook hot meals and improve their diet.

Visit the Fresh Start website: [www.fresh-startweb.org.uk](http://www.fresh-startweb.org.uk), or Tel 476 7741 to find out more.

Next Fresh Start collections, for starter packs, are on **12th January** and **23rd February 2014**, in the Main Hall after the morning service. See the list in last month's *Leaflet* for suitable items to donate – in good condition, please.

**Thanks for the generous response last month. Keep the donations coming!**

**Alison Ambler**

## Elders Retiring from the Kirk Session

Susan Beaumont, Alison Berrill and Maurice Berrill have each intimated their desire to retire from the Kirk Session and this was accepted at the November meeting. They were all thanked for their contributions to the work of the Session.

**Susan Beaumont** was ordained to the eldership and admitted to the Kirk Session in Greenbank in 2009. She has looked after Districts 41 and 42 since 2011 and has served on the Mission and Service Committee. She has served the congregation in a number of other important ways, as a member of the choir and praise group, leader of QII and as coordinator of volunteers.

**Alison Berrill** was ordained to the eldership and admitted to the Kirk Session at Greenbank in 1993. In the following 20 years Alison's service as an elder has been wide ranging. She was a member of the Communications Committee then served as its Convenor from 2001–05. She organised the Bookstall for some years, started the Library and recording of services for distribution to the housebound, helped with Christian Aid and provided leadership to a House group. Alison has looked after District 27 since 1994 and has served on the Board. She is continuing to serve as Church Archivist.

It is 43 years since **Maurice Berrill** was ordained to the eldership and admitted to the Kirk Session in Greenbank. He has been one of our longest serving elders, serving in Greenbank, the Presbytery of Edinburgh and the Church of Scotland at large. Maurice has always been most willing to share his extensive knowledge of Church matters and his wide range of skills. He was Editor of the *Leaflet* for 11 years, Convenor of the Communications Committee, member of the Congregational Board and Bereavement Team and a prison visitor.

He was our representative on the Presbytery from 1980–84, continued thereafter as a freely elected elder and served on several of its committees. He also served on Boards and Committees of the General Assembly. He looked after District 33 for over 40 years.



# Trip to the Holy Land

*November 2014*

Greenbank, Morningside and Mayfield Salisbury are planning a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for November 2014. There are still places available and if you are interested you can pick up a brochure from the Church vestibule or contact the Minister to find out more.

*Some images of the Holy Land  
May 2013*



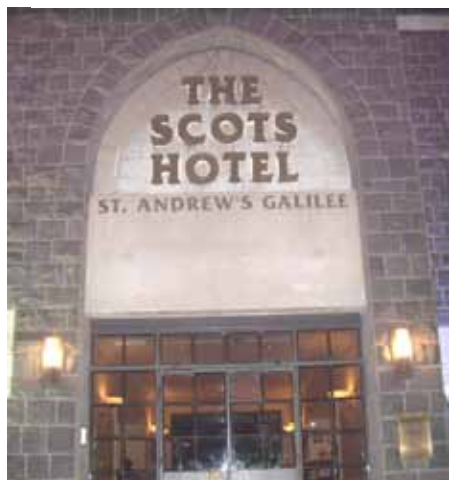
Temple of the Mount, Jerusalem



Jerusalem



Communion by the Sea of Galilee



Tiberias



Whale, Jaffa



Street in Old Jerusalem



Vad Yashem (Holocaust Museum), Jerusalem



Western (Wailing) Wall, Jerusalem



Olive grove



Market in Jerusalem



The Dead Sea (from Masada)



Entrance to Tabeetha School, Jaffa







## December Issue

### Christmas 2013

The journey and impact of a Blythswood Christmas shoebox.

## Book Review

### *God is Not a Christian Speaking Truth in Times of Crisis*

Desmond Tutu (Edited by John Allen)

ISBN 978-1-84-604264-5

Rider 2011. Paperback 2013

*God is Not a Christian* is a collection of speeches and interviews given by Desmond Tutu between 1975, when he became the first black Dean of Johannesburg, and 2009, as he approached his retirement from public life to concentrate on writing and spending time with his family. The Editor, John Allen, is also Tutu's biographer. He was Director of Communications for South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and was formerly Tutu's Press Secretary. He is now Managing Editor of the African news website, [allAfrica.com](http://allAfrica.com).

Throughout South Africa's struggle against apartheid, Desmond Tutu has not been afraid to speak out on behalf of the poor and downtrodden. In this anthology he shows himself to be an advocate of tolerance and respect, an international campaigner for justice, the voice of South Africa's voiceless, and South Africa's conscience. Although, inevitably, much of the content of his speeches is directed towards his own people, Tutu tackles world

Christmas prayer.

Reflections from the Rt Rev Lorna Hood, Ron Ferguson, the Very Rev Dr James Simpson and the Rev Scott McKenna.

A new resource from ALTERnativity.

The Big Question: What is the most moving Christmas service you have attended?

### 'God Can Do Miracles'

The work of HIV/AIDS charities in Scotland and Africa.

### A Safe Place

Douglas Brown describes the challenges facing an adult with autism.

### Saving Lives and Preventing Misery

The part of the Church of Scotland in the fight against TB.

### A Distinctive Church

John R Hume visits a Gothic-style treasure in Lockerbie.

### Changing Church

How a Perth church is bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary.

### Honouring a Role Model

The role of a Fife Sunday School teacher in a high profile award to Malala Yousafzai, the teenager who was shot by the Taliban for campaigning for girls' education.

### A Musical Leap of Faith

The Rev Dr Robin Hill, founder of the Heart and Soul Swing Band, explains how a plan to jazz up old hymns became a swinging reality.

**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.

issues as well, such as the Israel/Palestine situation, the Northern Ireland peace process, and human rights in parts of South America.

The Editor sets all the excerpts in context, with an outline of the circumstances in which they occurred, and Tutu's words on tolerance and respect, and on forgiveness, stand out courageously in a world where too few are willing to speak up for their beliefs and their faith. 'As the prophet Jeremiah says, *if I try to keep quiet it is as if the word of God burned like a fire in my breast*', he writes in his Foreword.

Louise Coghill

## Big Christmas Sing-along

A bright, happy event for all the family from babes in arms to grandparents. Come and sing your heart out and listen to Firrhill School Jazz Band + Choir, also Buckstone Primary School Choir. The Big Christmas Sing-along takes place in Greenbank Parish Church on Sunday 15th December, 5.30pm–6.15pm, followed by mulled wine, juice, gingerbread men, shortbread and a chance to buy home baking and preserves, courtesy of the Guild!

Have you looked at the website?

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



# World Mission

## Keeping Syrian children safe in Lebanon

Although the news from Syria has been more optimistic of late with regard to agreement on the disposal of chemical weapons, we should not imagine that the troubles of that country are over by any means. The following case study from Christian Aid demonstrates the huge ongoing problems of refugees fleeing from the fighting. Since the conflict in Syria began more than two years ago, 1.6 million people have fled, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. After an often long, gruelling and terrifying journey, many refugees arrive in neighbouring countries with few or no possessions. They are in desperate need of essential items such as food. This is the story of Hoda:

**'We buried my sister and then we left.'**

Hoda is 11 years old. She and her family were forced to flee their hometown of Derra in Syria. The last time they ran for shelter, Hoda lost her 10-year-old sister from a falling bomb.

Hoda arrived in Jnah camp near Beirut in Lebanon with her mother, brother and three sisters, having lost everything.

'I am very sad. I always remember what happened. We could not tell our grandma about our sister until later and my father, who was in Lebanon, did not find out for a few days.'

The Christian Aid partner, *Mouvement Social*, have helped 1,500 Syrian refugees in the last year, providing children with education, psychosocial support and food.

*Mouvement Social* is making a huge difference to Hoda and other children who have suffered so much as a result of the conflict. 'I love everything we do here. I especially love reading – I love Arabic literature,' says Hoda. As the conflict in Syria escalates, the future remains uncertain for Hoda and others like her. 'My mother is still very sad. I miss Syria, but I would not feel safe there now. I feel safe here, I like it here.'

I am writing this on Remembrance Sunday and this story is a salutary reminder, if we ever needed one, that war continues in many places in our world and that as always the casualties are not only those on the front line. Keep praying for Syria and support the work of Christian Aid's partners there.

More information can be found on the websites of Christian Aid ([www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)) and the Church of Scotland World Mission Council ([www.churchofscotland.org/serve/mission/worldwide](http://www.churchofscotland.org/serve/mission/worldwide)).

## Two dates for your diary

Members of the congregation may remember that a few years ago we held a *Souper Sunday* to support the work of the Church of Scotland HIV/AIDS programme and at the last meeting of the World Mission Committee we agreed that it would be good to repeat this event. *Sunday 19th January 2014* has been earmarked for this venture so put that date in your diary as a day when your lunch can be delicious soup and sandwiches at the church. Look out for more information nearer the time.

Before then, the next *One World Stall* will be on *Sunday 8th December*. As well as the usual range of goods we will have some special Christmas stock – gifts, decorations, cards etc for you to choose from. Come along after the 10.30am service and see what is available.

David Reid



Greenbank Parish Church  
Christmas Event

Merry Christmas

Saturday 7th December 2013  
1.30pm to 4.30pm

An afternoon of fun for all children  
of primary school age

To reserve a place, register online at  
[www.greenbankchurch.org](http://www.greenbankchurch.org)

Greenbank Parish Church, Braidburn Terrace, Edinburgh, EH10 6ES





## Souper Sunday

On **Sunday 19th January** the World Mission Committee will be hosting a Souper Sunday lunch after church. This is a fundraising event in support of the Church of Scotland's HIV programme. We hope you'll join us to support their great work, to sample the finest soups ever made in Greenbank, and to enjoy the amazing waiting skills of the World Mission Committee. Tickets will go on sale in December but be sure to put the date in your 2014 diary right now! We look forward to seeing you then.

Any souper soup makers who would be willing to make soup on the morning of Sunday 19th January, please get in touch with me by email [johnf@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:johnf@hotmail.co.uk).

John Ferguson

## The Guild

The Guild unusually has two meetings in December. The first one on the 3rd is a speaker from the Julius Project, the project which we are supporting financially this year. Those of you who were at the early service that we took at the beginning of November have heard a bit about it, but if you want to hear more do come along. The money that we raise at our Fund Raiser concert in February will all go towards this project.

Our Christmas party will be on 10th December – note there is only one week between these two meetings, and will be the usual blend of fun and food.

Christmas and New Year – best wishes to all our friends for a very happy festive season.

January starts with a coffee morning on the 7th at 10.30am where we can relax and chat after all the busyness, and then on the 21st the Rev Tom Gordon is coming to speak about *Parables for Today*. Tom has just written a new book, some copies of which he is bringing to sell and so if you are interested bring £10 with you!

**A date for your diary** – 18th February, Guild Fund Raiser: *A night with the Southern Light Senior Singers*.

Ann Pirie

## BOOKS WANTED

**Book Café, Greenbank Parish Church  
on Saturday 22nd February**

**11am–2pm**

**for Scottish Love in Action**

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



**CHILD / ADULT / FICTION / NON FICTION  
IN GOOD CONDITION  
WE WILL COLLECT**

**Contact Hazel Macaulay via the Church Office**



**The Church of Scotland HIV Programme:  
Changing the world one spoonful at a time**

## News from the Coffee Group

Thanks to the congregation for their donations for tea and coffee served after the 10.30am service on Sunday mornings. This year we are very happy to purchase another book trolley for the Church Library and to give £500 to the work of SLA.

Thanks also go to the many groups of volunteers who have served tea and coffee, then cleared up and washed dishes! Without you all refreshments could not be served.

My thanks also go to Pauline Walker and Fiona Grant for their help throughout the year.

Isobel Thom



## Thank You

I would like to take this opportunity to record my thanks to our minister, to the choir (which I miss so much) and to all my friends in the congregation who have been so attentive and constant in their support and prayers during my illness. The love and care you have shown through the cards and flowers and phone calls have been greatly appreciated by me (and by John), as have the visits to me in hospital and at home. Although I have not been able to attend church since February, and may not be able to attend regularly for some time, I have been made to feel still very much a part of the congregation. Thank you all for continuing to make this possible.

Mairi Stevenson

# Congregational Register

*Omitted from the on-line  
version of the Leaflet*

## Welcome Teams

### December

- 1** **Donald King**, Brian Barron, Walter Crosby, Donald MacLeod, Roderick Morrison, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young, Kathryn Sangster
- 8** **Stuart Sanders**, Moira Davidson, John Murison, Rachel Cadell, Jenny Wright, Sandy Cameron, Carrie Reid, Moira Land
- 15** **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones
- 22** **John George**, Rhian Ferguson, Alastair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Jill Powlett-Brown, Dorothy Whitehead, Tony Foster
- 29** **Alan Armit**, Edith Armit, Louise Coghill, Iain Davidson, Hugh Cowan, Susan Black, Malcolm Watters, Nora Kellock, Elizabeth Mackay

### 2014

#### January

- 5** **Roger Bland**, Eileen Campbell, Richard Dunbar, Clifford Hastings, Chris Horne, Doris Laing, Enid Mowat, Robin Nimmo, Keith Winton
- 12** **Donald King**, Brian Barron, Walter Crosby, Donald MacLeod, Roderick Morrison, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young, Kathryn Sangster
- 19** **John Ritchie**, Eric Brown, Stewart Coghill, Ralph Davidson, Susan Inch, Gill Sweetman, Ian Thomson, David Easton, Susan Jackman
- 26** **Stuart Sanders**, Moira Davidson, John Murison, Rachel Cadell, Jenny Wright, Sandy Cameron, Carrie Reid, Moira Land

#### February

- 2** **Rosemary McCulloch**, Rona Ferguson, Fiona Grant, Christina Morrow, Alison Murison, Malcolm Reid, Joan Ritchie, Toby Tucker, Alastair Ross

## Coffee Rota

### December

- 1** Communion  
**8** Rosemary McCulloch D49 & D50  
**15** Library  
**22** SLA  
**29** Teachers Group

### 2014

#### January

- 5** Help the Homeless  
**12** Moira Davidson D31B  
**19** World Mission  
**26** Edith Armit D12A

#### February

- 2** Lennie & Katy Maguire D20 & D19



## Crèche Rota

### December

- 1** Shona Murray  
**8** Isobel Thom  
**15** Janet Ferguson  
**22** Eileen McKinnon  
**29** Sharon Hamilton



## Flower Rota

### December

- |           | <i>Provided by</i> | <i>Delivered by</i> |
|-----------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b>1</b>  | Paddy Bowman       | Aileen Thomson      |
| <b>8</b>  | Dunbar Family      | Enid Mowat          |
| <b>15</b> | Christmas          | Anne Mainland       |

### 2014

#### January

- 5** Flower Group  
**12** Ishbel Clark  
**19** Sinclair family  
**26** Mackay family

#### February

- 2** Christine Willis



Material for the February *Leaflet* should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by Sunday 12th January, or sent by e-mail by 9am on Tuesday 14th January to [greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com](mailto:greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com)



## Some prayers of the Old Testament

*The old man, meek and mild, the priest of Israel, slept; his watch the temple child, the little Levite, kept...*

Generations of Sunday School children must have been puzzled by these lines from James Drummond Burns' hymn, *Hushed was the evening hymn*. Did they picture a boy of their own age looking after a pocket watch or some other timepiece? Of course this is simply a poetic way of saying that while an old man was sleeping a boy stayed awake. That boy was Samuel, whose story we can read in the first of the two books in the Bible bearing his name. While the incident described in the hymn, the account of God's call to Samuel, may be familiar to some, the story of events before and after his birth is less well known.

**The old man of the hymn was called Eli.** Eli was the priest in charge of the temple at Shiloh, the religious capital of Israel before Jerusalem gained precedence. A man called Elkanah went annually on pilgrimage to Shiloh and took with him his two wives: Peninnah, who had children, and Hannah, who was childless. In the culture prevailing at that time to be unable to conceive was cause for great shame. Peninnah mercilessly mocked Hannah's childlessness and constantly flaunted her own brood. At Shiloh Hannah's bitter misery led her to pray silently for a child. And she made a solemn promise that if God blessed her with a son, she would consecrate him to the service of God all his life. Her praying, rooted in her distress, anxiety and vexation, attracted Eli's attention: when he saw her mouth moving, but heard no words, he mistook her mumbled praying for drunkenness. However, when Hannah explained her predicament to him, Eli prayed that her request to God might be granted. Hannah left the sanctuary at Shiloh a changed woman: her connection with God transformed her so that she was no longer weeping and fasting. Here, praying to God is portrayed as being a natural activity for a distressed and anxious person to engage in; and it can result in a sense of peace and the relief of distress and anxiety.

**Hannah's plea was answered.** Within a year she gave birth to a son, and she named him Samuel. He would turn out to be a great prophet, and Eli's successor as religious leader of all the Jewish people. Hannah's joy knew no bounds. For his early years she kept him at home. Then, true to her promise, she took him to Shiloh where she turned him over to Eli to be brought up by him. There she sang a song of praise to God, an unforgettable expression of the transforming power and goodness of God.

**This prayer of praise is addressed to the God who is Lord of all.** Hannah's prayer acknowledges that God is the Lord, that people depend on God, and that God is the One who is believed to be in ultimate control of the lives of people on earth, all of which is nowadays contested by critics of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. Her song celebrates the presence of God in the world, the sheer reality of God's being. It is also a prayer of thanksgiving that this great God does good things for his people, especially when they suffer and are weak and powerless. This God has the power to bring down those who use their power and might arrogantly or wickedly.

**There are no requests to God in Hannah's song.** This is not a prayer which asks anything. Not all prayer is taken up with asking things of God. When prayers are answered, when God's people, or an individual, experience God's generous goodness in action, bestowing gifts beyond expectation, the only response possible is joyful celebration. Here in Hannah's thanksgiving and praise we are given a description of who God is, what God is like, and what God has done. Such prayer can be the discovery, or re-discovery, of God and of God's intentions for us. God offers an infinite range of possibilities for human lives: in prayer we can discover some of them. Hannah's experience enabled her to see the bigger picture, to realise that the God who had given her a child was at work in countless ways with life-transforming power, not only in her own situation but in the life of her nation and beyond.

**Parts of Hannah's song of praise may strike us as incongruous.** The opening and closing sound strangely like a celebration of victory after battle. *My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory... The Lord! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven.* The song seems to gloat over the humiliation of the rich and the proud. This feature should not prevent us from appreciating the song's spiritual richness. We now recognise that it was only with the life and work of Jesus that the biblical understanding of God's love was completed. In any case, it may be that Hannah borrowed these words from an existing hymn to celebrate not only the birth of her child but to honour the God who works powerfully and successfully for justice in human life.

**The theme of Hannah's prayer can be summed up as, God changes things!** God is active in the world, bringing about radical change in people's lives — he kills, he brings to life; he makes poor, he makes rich; he brings low, he raises up. Israel's God works by overturning expectations and assumptions that arise from human experience. This God may be seen as a threat or a promise: as a threat to all who put their trust in human institutions, in military might, in wealth or in social status; as a promise, a basis of hope, for all who put their trust in this God who is both powerful and compassionate.

**Hannah was a woman.** To us there may be nothing remarkable about this, but in Biblical times women often had a very limited and even repressed role in religious and social life. Although there are points where both in principle and in practice the Bible challenges and breaks down this restricted role, we cannot deny that it was more often than not the norm. Against such a background Hannah's prayer shines out and we can see in it the breaking down of barriers. However, not until we turn to the New Testament and to the Song of Mary, mother of Jesus, do we find anything similar on the lips of a woman. Mary's Magnificat continues and takes on Hannah's theme of the God who changes things, the revolutionary God who turns things and people upside down and inside out.

*Hannah's song of praise can be found in 1 Samuel 2, 1-10. Mary's Magnificat is in St Luke 1, 46-55 (also hymn 286).*