



25 March 2015

News:

The Ark gets top slot on BBC

A retelling of the biblical story of Noah will air in a primetime BBC slot this Easter.

The Ark, a one-off special written by Tony Jordan (Hustle, The Nativity) will air on BBC1 at 8.30pm on Monday 30 March. Written and produced over a period of three years, The Ark is Jordan's unique insight into the story of Noah and his family, a story that is found in Jewish, Christian and Muslim scriptures.

When BBC1 screened Tony Jordan's drama Nativity in 2010 it was watched by over five million viewers and garnered some of the best feedback the BBC has ever received for a popular drama.

Like Nativity, this film focuses on the human aspects of the narrative. It's a powerful, moving film that not only retells the story for a new generation, but also raises contemporary questions of family loyalty, self-doubt, and what it means to live as a person of faith in a world that doesn't believe.

Its stars include David Threlfall (Shameless, Master and Commander) as Noah and Joanne Whalley (Wolf Hall, Scandal) as his wife.

Joining forces for UK mission

The Revd Lynn Green joined leaders of other denominations to commit to renewed unity in evangelism and mission

Mrs Green, General Secretary of our Baptist Union, and the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, planted an oak tree to symbolise church unity in evangelism last week (10-11 March).

The planting took place at a gathering organised by the Evangelical Alliance, HOPE and the Church of England, which brought together 40 church leaders to the Lake District to consider how to help more people across the UK become followers of Jesus.

The aim was to "gather key Christian leaders to focus on evangelism", said a statement, "to understand the current trends in our population with regard to Christian faith and to commit to prayer and action together."

During the event the leaders held a prayer meeting on a boat on Lake Windermere and discussed how churches of different traditions and styles could learn and act together in response to Jesus' Great Commission to "Go and make disciples of all nations".

'It was a privilege to be part of this gathering,' said Mrs Green, 'as I have had a sense for some time that the Lord is calling us to work together across the churches for mission.

'As we look to our growing relationships in the future my prayer is that as we pray and act together we will be more faithful in sharing Jesus in our communities.'

Steve Clifford, general director of the Evangelical Alliance UK, who also chairs HOPE, added: 'We want to raise the bar in the UK population's understanding of who Jesus is, and increase the percentage of people in the UK who know a follower of Jesus who has positively shared life and faith with them.'

As well as including leaders from across the spectrum of denominations, there were also leaders from across ethnicities.

Yemi Adedeji, associate director for HOPE and director of the Evangelical Alliance's One People Commission, said: 'The presence and contribution of black and other ethnic church leaders during the summit was refreshing and invaluable in fostering unity in relationship, spirituality and common purpose.'

Roy Crowne, HOPE's director, said that one of his prayers for this event is that friendships will have grown.

'Out of fellowship the kingdom of God is expressed,' he explained. 'Our dream is that the Good News of Jesus will take root in our villages, towns and cities as churches and leaders build new bonds of friendship and the kind of unity that Jesus said would show the world what God is like.'

Churches welcome call for benefit sanctions review

A coalition of major UK Churches, including the Baptist Union, has welcomed the call for a full independent review of the benefit sanctions system. The recommendation comes in a report from the Work and Pensions Select Committee that has been released today (24 March).

Earlier this month the Churches called for such a review in their report Time to Rethink Benefit Sanctions which cited new evidence about the negative impact of the current regime.

They revealed that, in 2013/14, nearly seven million weeks of sanctions were handed out to people, with around 100,000 children affected.

The data, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, also shows that people who receive the sickness and disability benefit Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) because of a long-term mental health problem are being sanctioned at a rate of more than 100 per day. The most common reason for being sanctioned is being late or not turning up for an appointment.

“The Select Committee Report describes a system that is broken and needs urgent review,” said Paul Morrison Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church.

“Churches are often at the forefront of helping people who have been sanctioned and who are in desperate need of food, support and advice. It is unacceptable that vulnerable people can be left with no means of support as punishment for often very minor mistakes.

“The people we have met have spoken of the shame, demoralisation and loss of self-worth caused by this system. As Christians we believe that everyone is loved, valued and made in the image of God, and we have a responsibility to challenge any structure or system that undermines that dignity. We hope that whoever forms the next government will treat this issue with the urgency and seriousness it deserves.”

“So far, more than 1,400 people have written to their MPs about sanctions as a result of the campaign,” added Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty, “It's great that people in churches understand how important this issue is.

“We know that sanctions have a disproportionate impact on those who are most vulnerable: young people, care leavers, homeless people, single parents, the mentally ill and those with long-term illness. The new government must act to ensure that the benefits system provides a safety net for everyone, rather than making people destitute.”

Time to Rethink Benefit Sanctions was published by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Church Action on Poverty, the Church in Wales, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church and features the stories of people like Sarah* who have had their benefits sanctioned:

Sarah worked as a charity project coordinator until she was laid off due to funding cuts. She was asked to apply for eight jobs a week, but always applied for more as she was keen to get back to work. One week she was unable to fill out her job search on the computer because there were workmen fixing her roof and she had to stay in the house. Instead she filled out her search in a booklet. She contacted the jobcentre to explain, and ask if they needed any proof to support the booklet as she had emails from prospective employers and had even attended interviews. They said they didn't need anything from her.

When Sarah went to collect her money she was told she had been sanctioned. However, she did not receive the letter telling her she had been sanctioned so was unable to apply for discretionary funds to help support her and her family. Sarah successfully appealed the decision, though she says that Jobcentre Plus staff repeatedly tried to discourage her from doing so.

“Usually I'm quite a confident person, but they crush you. I found the experience at the Jobcentre Plus so awful I'd rather starve than go back there again. They should properly train the people in the job centre to treat us like people ...That whole attitude that people are scroungers is terrible, there's just no respect.”

The Department for Work and Pensions has failed to respond to a further FOI request regarding whether sanctions make it easier for the DWP to achieve its targets. This is despite

the fact that the Information Commissioner's Office ordered the DWP to respond by 15 March.

*not her real name

Syria Crisis: The Human Cost of Four Years of Fighting

The Syria conflict, now the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II, entered its fifth year at the weekend. As it continues to escalate, the need for the international community to redouble its efforts to bring about a political solution could not be greater, says Christian Aid.

Over 200,000 people have been killed inside Syria and half of the population has been forced to leave their homes. More than seven and a half million people are internally displaced and a further four million have fled to neighbouring countries.

It is estimated that more than 12 million people inside Syria, and millions more refugees across Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan are now in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of the conflict. The UN has described it as "the worst humanitarian crisis of our time".

Frances Guy, Head of Middle East at Christian Aid said, "Whilst the UK headlines are dominated by the terror of the so-called Islamic State there is a danger we forget the millions of Syrians, Iraqis and Palestinians, who have been forced to flee their homes.

"Families are living in cramped and overcrowded conditions in countries struggling to cope with the overwhelming number of refugees. Inside Syria itself, millions of people have been displaced from their homes, trying to seek sanctuary in safer parts of the country.

"And then there are those who can't escape, trapped in besieged areas of Syria, men, women and children who are often used as pawns by one side or another in the fighting."

Baptists in the region are among those responding to the humanitarian crisis, circumstances which were explored in an article for Baptists Together Magazine in 2014.

"The war in Syria and the Syrian refugee crisis have been on the forefront of the news worldwide for a while now," wrote Nabil Costa, the Executive Director of the Lebanese Baptist Society (LSESD) and a BMS World Mission trustee. "However, it is never more real than for the Lebanese people who are dealing with the difficult realities of it each and every day."

Since 2011, LSESD has been directly involved in reaching out to vulnerable Syrian families, including providing monthly food aid and medical assistance. "In the midst of all this, God is very much at work," added Mr Costa, "there are amazing stories of incredible answers to prayers, of visions and of healing. God is transforming the Church, and the communities through the Church."

Alongside this, BMS World Mission continues to respond to the humanitarian tragedy by providing food aid to displaced families and supporting Syrian refugees who have fled to Lebanon and Jordan.

The #withSyria coalition has launched a global petition calling on world leaders to do more to end the suffering of the Syrian people. You can sign the petition here www.withsyria.com/

Report: 'Councils failing to protect homeless teenagers'

Councils in England are failing to protect thousands of teenagers who face homelessness by turning them away when they seek help, according to new research by The Children's Society.

'Getting the House in Order,' a new report launched today (Friday 20 March) shows that each year 12,000 homeless 16 and 17-year-olds ask councils for help with housing. The report reveals that almost half are turned away. Councils are breaking the law by failing to even assess them.

More than 80 per cent of homeless 16 and 17-year-olds do not receive accommodation. Almost half (45%) of older homeless teenagers who asked for help did not receive an assessment.

The research based on Freedom of Information Requests – sent to 353 local councils and compiled from 259 responses – also reveals that homeless 16 and 17-year-olds are rarely given the same support as children in care such as access to an advocate or financial support.

Liam Hill, 22, a youth mentor, who now lives in Staffordshire, became homeless aged 16 after his relationship with his mum broke down. "I was passed from pillar to post and given no support from the council," he said. "They put me in a cramped, cold room in a B&B that had no hot water, then in a hostel where people tried to sell me drugs all the time."

"These teenagers are being hung out to dry," said Matthew Reed, Chief Executive of The Children's Society, which helps vulnerable young people at risk of abuse and exploitation. "They are facing huge dangers from predators who seek to abuse or exploit them. Councils need to do much more to protect these vulnerable teenagers. Every teenager deserves a safe place to live."

The Children's Society is calling for councils to join up their services and make sure that all teenagers who seek help for homelessness are assessed and given adequate support. B&B accommodation should be banned completely and hostels and supported accommodation should be regulated.

Opinions

300 year old National Trust gem in need of new 'friends'

A tiny yet historically significant Baptist chapel in Lincolnshire has been lovingly cared for by 'Friends of Monksthorpe' and The National Trust for over 20 years. But what does the future hold? Frances and Harry Godden explain why Monksthorpe is so special and what you can do to get involved

In November 1990 an article appeared in the Baptist Times entitled 'The little Church which time forgot'. The church was Monksthorpe, situated some seven miles inland from Skegness,

Lincolnshire, and in danger of falling down. As a result of the article in the Baptist Times, 'Friends of Monksthorpe' was established with a view to saving this unique place of Baptist worship.

In 2014, these 'Friends of Monksthorpe' published a 60-page booklet, An Anthology of Monksthorpe Memories to bring together a wide variety of memories of folk who have had association with Monksthorpe over the last 70 years as well as summarising the preceding 200 years.

What makes Monksthorpe special is its historical significance and hidden, beautiful setting, some distance from the nearest road. The chapel is approached by an avenue of mature trees. The whole site including buildings, an open baptistry used for over 250 years, and an attractive graveyard, is surrounded by more trees and hedges with a small wood at the far end. The chapel was built in 1701 'to look like a barn' when Baptists were still in danger of persecution. There had been a Baptist group meeting in secret in the area for some 30 years before this date. The chapel, linked to Burgh le Marsh, with a lively evangelical membership who gathered from miles around, was in continual use till 1976 when a large tree caused subsidence and rendered the building unsafe.

Restoring the Chapel, and the quaint chapel keeper's cottage and stable block alongside it, has been a very long and expensive task, beyond the reach of a geographically-scattered group of concerned people. Early on The National Trust was approached to consider taking over responsibility. After lengthy negotiations this was completed in 2000 and the full restoration has progressed slowly since. A National Trust official commented that it was her favourite property in the East Midlands.

Since 1993 services have been held at Monksthorpe on a monthly basis, on the third Saturday afternoon in the months from April to October, the year concluding with a candle light carol service in December. The congregation travels from across the East Midlands and is joined by more local folk from Baptist and other denominations; some only attend Monksthorpe, regarding it as their church. With no electricity and an old harmonium, the services are simple with a relaxed formality and cup of tea afterwards. Most who attend take time to wander in the peace of the setting to the far end of the graveyard with views out across large adjacent fields that were a wartime aerodrome.

The regular services leave their own ambience, unwritten but almost tangible to those who visit at other times, similar to the 'feel' of a house when the occupants are not at home. Comments in the visitor's book reflect this. Visitors can borrow the key from Gunby Hall, a nearby National Trust property. Folk mention the simplicity of the chapel and what it stands for, and the peace and spirituality of the whole site. Understandably The National Trust, while maintaining the buildings and site, is not in a position to organise the services which are a blessing to those who come. However the Trust is very enthusiastic that the story of the church and what Baptists stand for are made clear. It has been possible on the Interpretation Boards displayed in the restored cottage, and in the recent publication mentioned below, to tell the story of the chapel and outline something of the Christian message as Baptists understand it.

The church has no membership and no real community. Those who have been responsible through Friends of Monksthorpe for the last 25 years are inevitably getting older. Monksthorpe is a gem for The National Trust, but also a unique opening for witness for the Baptist family. It is important that the Baptist input into Monksthorpe continues, but how this will happen has yet to be decided.

How you and your church can be involved

- Simply attend a monthly Saturday afternoon service
- Be blessed by worshipping in the beautiful, peaceful setting; give yourself space; feel the legacy of centuries of faithful witness
- Why not have a day out and include Gunby Hall or Skegness; bring a packed lunch; perhaps make it a church outing!
- Visit anytime; wander around the site and find its special spots. For access to the building you need the key from Gunby Hall.

Help maintain the witness which touches visitors

- Friends of Monksthorpe arrange services in keeping with the historic setting; ongoing help is needed. National Trust is eager for the services to continue, but this needs Baptist commitment.
- There are opportunities for light hands on help with the upkeep.

If you are interested or want to know more, visit www.monksthorpe.org.uk

An Anthology of Monksthorpe Memories, and two other booklets about the history of Monksthorpe, are available to buy from Harry and Frances Godden. Call 01636 708 055 or email harryandfrances@care4free.net or contact Bryan Keyworth on 01773 713 044, email: bh.keyworth@ntlworld.com

What should preaching be for?

I think it boils down to three things, writes Colin Sedgwick

I received a very kind email recently from someone in a church where I had preached. He thanked me for my visit and added, "It was a very enjoyable service".

Well, we all like a bit of praise, me as much as anyone; so my first reaction was, I confess, a little preening. But on reflection I found myself stubbing my toe, so to speak, against that word "enjoyable". Are services supposed to be "enjoyable"? Are sermons supposed to be "enjoyable"? I decided the answer was No with a capital N.

I don't want to seem critical of that man. Very likely he hadn't thought much about his choice of words, and "enjoyable" sprang to mind as a way of expressing general appreciation. But still it struck a jarring note. It made worship and preaching seem like a song or a comedy turn.

It's hard to imagine Jeremiah denouncing the waywardness of the people of Jerusalem, or John the Baptist dramatically calling people to repentance, or Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, accusing his hearers of killing Jesus - hard to imagine scenes like this, and people then turning to one another, smiling, and saying "That was an enjoyable message."

(I heard of an Anglican bishop who, reflecting on his ministry, asked ruefully why it was that "everywhere Paul went they had a riot; everywhere I go they make cups of tea." Well, there are times when cups of teas are what is needed, so I hope he wasn't too hard on himself. But I think he had his finger on a point that all of us, Anglican or otherwise, might take to heart.)

What word might be appropriate to express appreciation of preaching? Here are a few candidates: inspiring; challenging; uplifting; comforting; thought-provoking. I think I'd be more than happy with any of those. But enjoyable...?

Somebody said that the aim of preaching is "to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable." Neat! And not bad, I reckon. But it's worth probing a little more deeply to try and tease out exactly what we think preaching is for - or, at least, what it should be for.

Boiling it right down, I suggest three things.

1 - Preaching aims to instruct our minds

Preaching, even with the various forms of visual aids we are increasingly used to, is essentially words, and words are primarily addressed to our minds. We are being given a message of some sort, and the way we process it is with our minds. A sermon which doesn't tell me something I didn't know before or (perhaps more likely) remind me of something I have forgotten, is a waste of time.

I mentioned earlier Peter's Pentecost Day sermon (Acts 2), and it is striking how much of it consists of factual information. Of course, to suggest that the gospel in particular and God's word in general are nothing more than mere information would be well wide of the mark. But they certainly aren't less.

This reminds us that we need teaching. Truth isn't automatically acquired; it has to be listened to and digested. And this applies above all to the truth about God and so-called "spiritual" things.

2 - Preaching aims to stir our hearts

We are called to love God. True, love is more, a whole lot more, than simply emotion; but again, it isn't less. The Bible encompasses a wide range of feelings - love, hate, hope, fear, doubt, compassion, yearning, anger, joy.

Even if our preaching is not especially emotional (think of the Welsh preacher's sing-song hwl, or the African-Caribbean's soaring rhetoric), something is missing if it doesn't move us. This, I sometimes think, is an area where those of us preachers who are college-trained and book-learned can be lacking. God's truth is heart-stirring truth, and our preaching should reflect that.

3 - Preaching aims to shape our wills

Yet again, Christianity is certainly not just about right and wrong, but it is very lacking if morality and ethics don't figure prominently. Loving our enemies, being strictly honest, maintaining moral purity, returning good for evil, working day by day for God's glory - all these commands call for the exercise of our wills, and in this sense preaching should be challenging.

Our wills take time to be reshaped in the likeness of Christ, and the process can only be effective by the power of the Holy Spirit. But that is our ultimate vision. And so preaching that leaves us just as we were has to that extent failed.

In a nutshell, preaching is intended as a God-given agent of change. The change may be of that tiny incremental kind that we barely notice, but which is real nonetheless; or it may be of that great kind that we call "conversion"; or it may be anywhere in between. Paul says that we who follow Jesus are "being changed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). God wants us, ultimately, to be like him, and preaching is an important part of the means whereby this happens.

As I said, I didn't feel easy about being told my sermon was enjoyable. But I must confess that I took real pleasure (I hope not seriously sinful!) in a remark made by one of the "yoof" after a service one Sunday. This was at a time when (don't ask me why or how) the word "wicked" had become a term of high praise. I went away glowing after being told, "Wicked sermon, Col."

What he really meant, of course, was "Thank you, dear pastor, for a sermon which I have found edifying, challenging, uplifting, comforting and thoroughly helpful. It has truly instructed my mind, moved my heart and challenged my will."

That's my story, anyway, and I'm sticking to it...

Colin Sedgwick is a Baptist minister living in north-west London, with many years' experience in the ministry. He is also a freelance journalist, and has written for The Independent, The Guardian, The Times, and various Christian publications. He blogs at sedgonline.wordpress.com

Politics, and the disruption of the temple

As we enter Holy Week and remember how Jesus cleansed the temple of greed and profit, we are reminded that our engagement in the political narratives of our day is not a distraction from our Gospel identity... but an expression of it. By Phil Jump

There are many ways in which God's people are called to worship; sometimes through the great words of a Psalm, maybe a choral anthem, a shared recited response, or perhaps a simple invitation through silence and stillness to "tune in" to his presence.

However we are summoned - worship is an encounter with the living Christ, enabled by his Spirit.

What we might not expect, is to be drawn into Christ's presence through the clatter of upturned market stalls and the spilled contents of a cash register; the squarking and flapping of frightened, escaped birds and the crack of a whip.

Yet for the people of Jerusalem, gathered for their Passover, these were exactly the sights and sounds that summoned their attention to the presence of Jesus. And in the midst of the ensuing chaos, he announced that this was his way of calling every bystander, every customer and every merchant to make this a courtyard of prayer.

Palm Sunday is the day we traditionally remember the events surrounding Jesus' final entry into Jerusalem - coming as King, coming as sacrifice, but confronted by the commerce and opportunism of religious tourism. The temple traders were out to make a fast buck - overcharging for animal sacrifices, and making a fair markup on the exchange deals for temple currency.

And while death and resurrection may be the climax of this historic week, they are not a reason for Jesus to overlook the commercial and political realities that he encounters.

God called his people to seek justice before offering the worship of festival and sacrifice

Jesus disrupts the activities of those who exploit and take advantage of the needs of others, and in so doing makes waves that ripple through the corridors of power. The events of Holy Week do not avoid the prevailing political realities, but engage with them and in human terms, are ultimately a consequence of them.

Our journey through Holy Week this year will take place against the backdrop of an election campaign. The same dynamics of inequality, exploitation, social exclusion and self-interest that Jesus found in the temple market place, will no doubt be rehearsed in many of the political narratives that we absorb.

As we journey into his presence and encounter him afresh, we do so not by ignoring the political questions and realities around us, but by reflecting on what the life and teaching of Jesus have to say about them.

Just as in the Old Testament, God called his people to seek justice before offering the worship of festival and sacrifice, so the road to Calvary confronts and disrupts an economy of self interest and personal gain.

The Jesus we meet in the events of Holy Week was deeply engaged in such issues - our engagement in the political narratives of our day is not a distraction from our Gospel identity, but an expression of it.

The Revd Phil Jump is Regional Minister Team Leader of the North Western Baptist Association

Love Your Neighbour - Think, Pray, Vote: The Joint Public Issues Team of our Baptist Union, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church has prepared election resources to help Christians and others reflecting on the issues and deciding how to vote

The property tycoon who struck real gold

Filthy Rich is Manoj Raithatha's account of how a life driven by ruthless ambition fell apart - and was transformed by a powerful encounter with Jesus

On the inside front page of *Filthy Rich* is a dedication from the author 'to my wife, Maria, whom I failed many times. I am so sorry that it took so long to appreciate the gift you are in my life.' It encapsulates the transformation at the heart of the book.

Filthy Rich is Manoj Raithatha's personal story of ruthless ambition, of risk-taking and restlessness. It is the story of one man's belief that 'money trumps morals, money equals power' and his desire to become as rich and powerful as possible – whatever the cost.

But it is also the story of what happens when everything falls apart – of new beginnings, re-evaluating priorities in life and emerging a better man as a result.

Manoj Raithatha was raised as a Hindu in Watford and in Kenya. Interested in business at a young age, he started selling alcohol and cigars at school, and soon realized the power of money to 'buy' school friends. 'Now that I had started', he writes in *Filthy Rich*, 'there was no going back.'

He seemed to have achieved success when his debut play 'BBA and Proud', written when he was a student, won an Edinburgh Fringe First prize and led to a contract for the BAFTA-winning, Emmy-nominated children's TV series, *My Life as a Popat*.

But Manoj wanted more. Money became a 'real-life magnet' in his life – a factor which intensified when, after working briefly as a teacher, a playwright and a furniture salesman, he became a buyer of new build properties. In his desire to become 'filthy rich', he started taking bigger risks, making higher profits, becoming more addicted to the heady buzz of the business world – and neglecting his wife and family as a result.

At one point, he bought 220 apartments in Leeds in a deal worth over £30 million – believed to be the biggest single deal in the North that year - and was the focus of a major feature in the property section of the *Daily Telegraph* in 2005. Manoj soon had a substantial property portfolio stretching across the UK, including properties in Leeds, Manchester, Bradford, Sheffield and London. He owned his dream house, took luxury holidays with his family and enjoyed an enviable lifestyle.

However, while Manoj was 'lost in an increasingly unreal world', his wife Maria was desperately unhappy:

'I felt each day I was losing my husband; the kind-hearted guy... who promised to always cherish me,' she says. 'I felt powerless to stop the growing chasm between us... Money is good – you need it to get by and to help others with less. However, it can also change people and families for the worse overnight. I felt like a stranger in my own home.'

Manoj's professional and personal world came tumbling around him in 2008 when the mortgage market collapsed and his two year old son Ishaan was hospitalised with breathing difficulties and nearly died. In desperation, Manoj prayed to God for the first time in over 20 years – 'in recent years,' he writes, 'I had made money and success my God. But at this point, all the money in the world would not make a blind bit of difference.'

Deeply touched by the prayers and concern of a Christian couple from his daughter's school while Ishaan was ill, Manoj and his wife Maria went to church with the couple after Ishaan's recovery to thank them – and a few weeks later, Manoj gave his life to Christ. Maria's Christian faith of her youth was reignited too, and they were both baptised in the same ceremony.

The path ahead was not easy. Manoj suffered chest pains and anxiety attacks as he slowly worked through his business affairs and numerous negotiations and compromises to prevent losing everything. He had to learn how to relinquish control to God and to learn obedience and humility – which did not come naturally to this ambitious businessman, especially when he was turned down for ordination training.

Manoj admits that he is still very much a 'work in progress' as a husband and as a Christian. But he is now passionate about using the world of business to shape the world for good and for God. In partnership with Bridget Adams, Manoj set up Instant Apostle publishing house in 2011 to provide a vehicle to quickly release books and pamphlets by Christian writers, enabling authors to expeditiously comment on topical issues. Manoj admits that for many years business was primarily to make him rich. In contrast, Instant Apostle is about 'creating a better future and space for others to express their passions'.

In addition to his business work, Manoj heads up the South Asian Forum team at the Evangelical Alliance, set up to unite, connect and represent those with a heart to reach the South Asian community for Christ.

And he hopes too that by sharing his story, others may be impacted. Praised by Steve Clifford, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, as 'an amazingly encouraging account of a life turned around by a powerful encounter with Jesus', Manoj says *Filthy Rich* has been sensitively written so that it can be given to those of other faiths as well as people who have no faith.

Filthy Rich (9780 85721 590 1), paperback £8.99, is published by Lion Hudson and is available now from high street bookstores, Christian bookshops and online retailers.

Manoj Raithatha is also co-author of *Building the Kingdom through Business* (ISBN 9780 95591 351 8), published by Instant Apostle, and is available from Christian bookshops and online retailers.

Walking Together, Literally

Walking with someone is a great way to get to know them and so, with that in mind, Revd Mary Moody decided to spend her sabbatical taking on a physical and spiritual challenge mary-on-chiltern-way-2

On a gorgeously spring-like March day, Baptist minister Mary Moody is making the most of the sunshine by slipping on her walking shoes and venturing outside. But she isn't just taking a stroll round the Hertfordshire village where she lives, she's setting out on the first of many 10-mile walks to raise money for Home Mission.

From March to May, during her sabbatical, Mary is taking on the challenge of walking the Chiltern Way (159 miles including the Northern Extension and Letchworth Garden City Greenway) in 10-mile chunks.

"At a Hertfordshire Ministers' meeting last year, Colin Pye, the Regional Minister of the Central Baptist Association, showed a map with a dot for each Baptist Church in the CBA – 156 of them – and talked about encouraging closer links between churches," Mary explains. "I started to wonder, what if, during my sabbatical, I could get some CBA ministers to walk together literally? What if I could walk a mile for each of the CBA member churches – walking in Herts, Beds and Bucks? What if I could get sponsorship and raise money for Home Mission, funding from which has made much of the story of Bovingdon Baptist Church possible?"

Mary has led Bovingdon Baptist Church for seven years, first as Lay Pastor, then as ordained Minister – and this has only been possible thanks to a grant from Home Mission. The church, set in a busy commuter-belt village, has just 22 members. When Mary and her husband moved to the village, their two small children doubled the size of the Sunday school.

"We are a small church but we're definitely not small-minded or small-hearted," says Mary. "We are growing – both numerically and spiritually! – and we're achieving this through being like-minded and committed to serving and caring for each other and those in the wider community."

As Mary spends the next two months fitting her walking days around the weather, family commitments and other daily tasks, she is seeking partners to walk sections of the Chiltern Way with her. "Walking together is a commitment," Mary explains. "It takes time (slows us down), is a great way to listen to each other, to get to know people better, to gain a new perspective on a place that you think you know well."

Mary is hoping to raise £2 per mile for Home Mission. "Home Mission brings together big-hearted churches, some of which have deep faith but don't have the pockets to match," says Mary as she ponders what Home Mission means to her and her church. "For me, and the folk at Bovingdon Baptist Church, it is God's provision, enabling me to pastor the people and serve the community in a full-time capacity, facilitating outreach and growth. Home Mission is walking together in ministry and mission, literally."

You can catch up with Mary on her blog, which she'll be updating regularly as she continues her walk. And you can support Mary's efforts by visiting her [JustGiving](#) page.

Baptisms:

Barrow upon Soar Baptist Church, Leics: Gavin James, Yasmin Curtis

Her Majesty's Prison Thameside, South East London: Martin M

Lee Mount Baptist Church, Yorkshire: Joel Duncan

Stoke Baptist Church, Stoke-on-Trent: Alan Tokes

Baptism stories:

Martin M was baptised in Her Majesty's Prison Thameside in South East London. The Revd Andrew White, the Managing Chaplain, said: "A prison chaplaincy is a like a Local Ecumenical Partnership, where our baptisms have come from Catholic, Anglican and Free Church backgrounds – we try to affirm and celebrate across the different traditions. However, Martin's baptism was significant as it was the 50th in three years since the prison opened! The 70+ worshipers on a Sunday morning were really excited for Martin."

We baptised and welcomed into membership Alan Tokes on 1 March 2015 at our Cafe Sunday lunchtime gathering, writes Marg Hardcastle (minister Stoke Baptist Church) Alan came to know the church through our monthly informal lunch-church and cafe, through which he found a warm welcome and his faith re-awakened - so we felt that was the most appropriate setting in which to baptise him. It was a very joyous event with a special sense of God's presence and blessing on the day. Several people from our midweek church-plant Faith in The Village joined us for the occasion, representing a number of different Christian denominations, along with friends of Alan from the local community.

Deaths:

HENSTOCK, the Revd Paul, on 15 March 2015, aged 76. His last appointment was as manager of the Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society.

TWINING, the Revd Dr (Robert) Keith, on 12 January 2015, aged 75. His last pastorate was as part-time assistant minister at Charlton Kings, Cheltenham, a position he combined with a full-time teaching job. He left Charlton Kings in 1994 to continue to work full time as a teacher. He was a member of Cambray Baptist Church in Gloucester and assisted Gas Green Baptist Church for many years until around 2010. He leaves a widow.

Events:

Baptist Assembly 2015

We warmly invite you to gather with us for our 2015 Baptist Assembly on 16 May at the KingsGate Conference Centre, Peterborough, for a day which will allow us to explore and be inspired in mission and discipleship.

You can book online and find out more information at
www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/247895/The_Baptist_Assembly.aspx

The Angus Library and Archive: Virtue and Vice and All Things Nice exhibition

Free exhibition and talks

20-25 April, Regents College, Oxford

An exhibition celebrating literature and showcasing some of the extraordinary and unique examples held in The Angus Library and Archive. Featured works will include wonderful accounts of travel and exploration, early examples of children's literature and a selection of work by John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

23 April 2015 – Prof. Anne Dunan-Page will be speaking on the works of John Bunyan.

24 April 2015 – Dr Hannah Field will be speaking on children's literature.

The exhibition and talks are free to attend, but booking is essential. Tickets can be booked online. For more information call 01865 288120 or visit theangus.rpc.ox.ac.uk