

Issue 39

inspire

Stories to lift your spirits

2009
holiday
special

Bear Grylls: why I push myself to the limit

From **robber** to **fundraiser**

New life for a no-hope estate

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Jordan pilgrimage

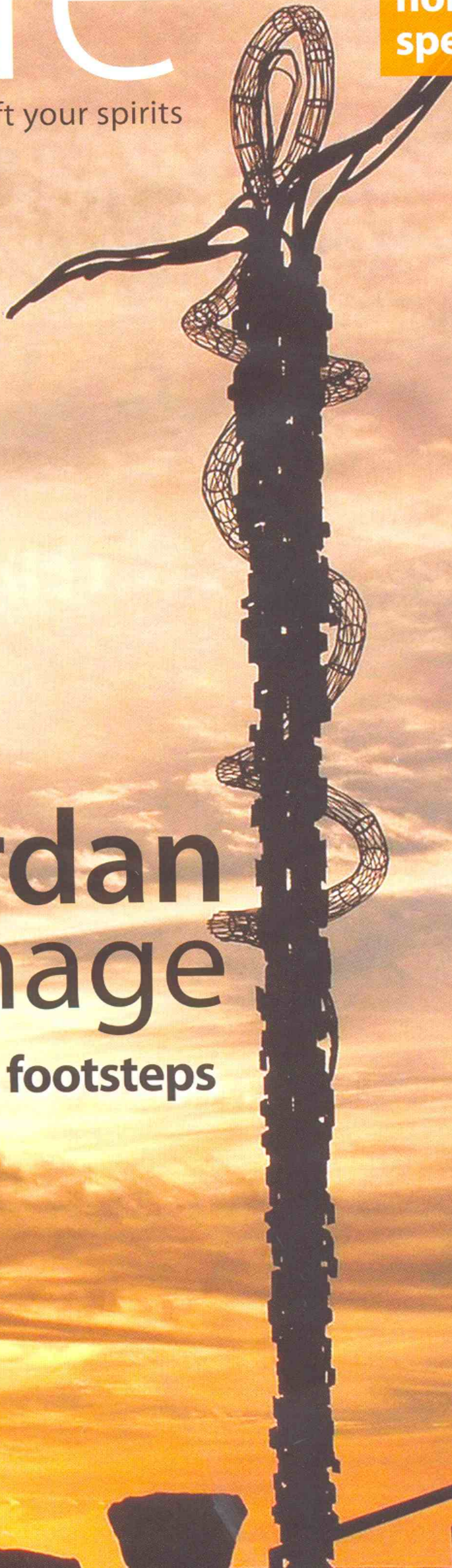
Following Abraham's footsteps

PLUS:

Great giveaways, puzzles, fun and more!

June 2009

Free to churches



MOST OF US have experienced it at one time or another – a movie touches a chord and we want to travel to visit the film location; we savour the work of a favourite author so we are keen to see the desk, the room, where inspiration struck; we research our family history and we cover miles to stand outside a house, beside a grave.

The power of place is such that, by getting close to the source, we hope perhaps a little bit of the magic will rub off on us.

This desire is not new. For centuries pilgrims have travelled to destinations associated with their faith, seeking to gain a new insight and understanding of biblical teaching, and to enter into a special relationship with God. Of these,

tranquillity of the site of Jesus's baptism – if you are looking for a deeper appreciation of the challenges faced by those sometimes elusive biblical figures, then walking within the ancient buildings and dramatic landscape cannot but prove moving and inspiring.

Yet Jordan also provides an opportunity to experience how faith is being realised today. The country is situated in what could be considered a rough neighbourhood, nestling among Iraq, Syria, Israel and Saudi Arabia, yet its social and religious tolerance sets it apart from the rest of the Middle East. A modern Islamic state, around seven per cent of the population are Christian and people from the two faiths live companionably alongside each other. Indeed interfaith



relations here are leading the world.

"The message of Christianity is to show love for my neighbour," says Fr Nabil Haddad, one of the founders of the *Interfaith Resource Centre* in Amman, where nine Christian denominations work with the Imam. "I am invited in as the minority, but I have to be open to be invited," he says. "My neighbour is not an Anglican but a Muslim, with whom I share this beautiful country. We have extraordinary wealth – a history of the holy land."

Villagers and ordinary people are now seeking to tap into these riches. Where previously tourists were kept apart from the locals in visiting the historic sites, now interaction is encouraged through home visits and hospitality.

"We are trying to do something

different here," says Daniel Adamson, director of development for a new initiative called *The Abraham Path*. "In travelling to a new place, you usually meet the local people only when they are serving you in hotels and restaurants. Here the visitor comes with humility and gratitude for the hospitality they will receive. They walk, taking a journey on foot, where they assume a position of vulnerability. It is the culture of a pilgrim rather than a tourist."

The Abraham Path is a hiking trail supported by the United Nations and many other international organisations but it is 'owned' by members of the local community with the aim of attracting tourists to less familiar locations, and seeking to encourage rural development which preserves the countryside.

The route follows the footsteps of Abraham, the father of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and introduces visitors to the shared heritage of the faiths. By retracing this journey, the Path provides a place of meeting and connection for people of different backgrounds, but with common needs and desires.

In Orjan village, local man Eisa has been instrumental in supporting the Abraham Path and invites walkers in his home for food and drink. Here, his mother and wife bake bread in a stone oven downstairs for guests who are invited into the *dirwan*, the first room you enter in the house and a public space where visitors sit on cushions on the floor and drink sweet mint tea.

Eisa enthusiastically talks about his hopes for the project. "We are all one family," he says. "We want to show visitors how we are alike rather than how we are different. We have the same hopes, the same problems as you. My hope is for the whole world to be like my family, and we are starting here."

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Pilgrims in Jordan

CATHERINE LARNER visits a Middle Eastern country where faith communities are learning to live together

the holy sites in Israel are probably the best known and most visited but, across the border, the often overlooked country of Jordan has much to offer.

The exposed, barren landscape where Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot, the mountaintop eyrie of Herod's Palace where Salome danced and John the Baptist was beheaded, or maybe the immense scope and beauty of the Promised Land revealed to Moses on Mount Nebo. Then there is the lush



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