

Ben Hodgson (77) **On location with the Wise Men from the East**

An article entitled "I shot Jesus" written by cameraman Ben Hodgson appears in the first issue of *The Magazine*. Viewers of the recent, highly acclaimed Channel 4 TV series *The Bible: A History* may also have noticed Ben's name as the cameraman in the credits. Unfortunately due to lack of space we were unable to print this article that appeared in *The Times* in November 2009 about the filming of this series.

On location with the Wise Men from the East

A British company is busy capturing the Church's lectionary cycle on digital film in the heat and the dust: filming the coming of the three Magi near Ouarzazate, south of the High Atlas mountains, Morocco. From *The Times*, November 6, 2009 by Bess Twiston Davies (with acknowledgements).

"November in North Africa. It is 28 degrees, the sky is a perfect cloudless blue. And Jesus, who's sitting right in front of me, is about to turn water into wine. No, I'm not hallucinating, but simply watching the filming of the Marriage Feast of Cana on location near the Atlas Mountains.

It's the second shoot by *Big Book Media*, a company set up by Hannah Leader, a Christian media lawyer and film producer. Her aim? To capture on film each reading in the Church's three-year lectionary cycle — and then to film, for evangelical churches that favour "theme-based" services instead, all the Bible passages not in the lectionary. There will be a children's version too, for use in Sunday School (called *The 3 Wise Camels*) with a voiceover by Diana-Louise Jordan.

The idea is that vicars needing a film clip to enliven their Sunday preaching can either download the clips from a website, or subscribe for a monthly lectionary film clip on DVD. "When you preach and are trying to bring a scene to life, often you will begin by scene-setting," says the Rev Trevor Critchlow, the London-based vicar who is theological adviser to *Big Book Media*. "Many hear the words but it is not moving them in the same way that seeing a picture or dramatisation of the Gospel does." Leader is blunter: "I had a feeling that for 50 per cent of the congregation the words of the Gospel are floating over their heads," she says...

For **Ben Hodgson**, the director of photography, the shoot has changed notions of the Virgin Mary. "I am not Catholic," he says, "but through the shoot I have come to have affinity with her as an ordinary human being — a vulnerable 17-year-old who has got pregnant, whose parents are upset, whose future husband is walking out."

Hodgson's technique is meditative. He builds the shots in each scene so that the viewer is gradually brought from an initial distance to a close-up with Jesus: "I want to get the viewer into a position where for a few moments you could feel that you are not observing it as a spectator in someone else's story but actively participating in it." He is using Red, a digital camera that produces film at very high resolution at up to 30 frames a second; such quality was chosen so that it would reproduce well on internet clips or on a data projector."