



St Luke's in the City

150 years - 2009

# Celebrating at the Crossroads

## Thanksgiving

12 October 2008

### JEWISH HIGH HOLY DAYS

Our Jewish parents in the faith have just celebrated the High Holy Days, observed during the 10 day period between the first day **Rosh ha-Shanah** and the tenth day **Yom Kippur** of Tishri, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. This year *Rosh ha-Shanah* began at sundown on Tuesday 30 September, and *Yom Kippur* at sundown on Wednesday 8 October.

*Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur* are the most important of all Jewish Holidays and the only holidays that are purely religious, as they are not related to any historical or natural event. *Rosh ha-Shanah*, the Jewish New Year, is celebrated the first and second days of Tishri. It is a time of family gatherings, special meals and sweet-tasting foods. *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting, reflection and prayer, is the most solemn day of the Jewish year and observed on the tenth day of Tishri.

During the next week they will be celebrating feasts relating to historical events: **Sukkot**, the Feast of Tabernacles, commencing sundown Monday 13, **Shemini Atzeret**, the Eighth Day of the Assembly, commencing sundown Monday 20, and **Simhat Torah**, Rejoicing in the Torah commencing sundown Tuesday 21 October.

*Sukkot*, which lasts for seven days, celebrates the 40-year period when the children of Israel wandered in the desert, living in booths. It is the religious duty of the faithful to build a *sukkah* (singular form of *sukkot*) for their family, eating all of the week's meals in it, even sleeping in this temporary 'booth' if climate permits, and to give hospitality to the stranger and wanderer.

Though *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simhat Torah* are separate festivals they are commonly thought of as part of *Sukkot*. *Shemini Atzeret* is explained this way: 'Our Creator is like a host, who invites us as visitors for a limited time, but when the time comes for us to leave our *sukkah*, He has enjoyed himself so much that He asks us to stay another day.'

*Simhat Torah* marks the completion of the annual cycle of readings in the synagogue (the Christian Lectionary is based on its synagogue forebear), reading the last Torah portion, then proceeding immediately to the first chapter of Genesis, a reminder that the Torah is a circle, and never ends. It is a time of great rejoicing with processions of the Torah scrolls around the synagogue.

Richest blessings during their high and holy days on these our sisters and brothers, the first people of God!