

## **Visit from Bishop Moses Deng Bol, Bishop of Wau diocese in the Sudan, St. Aldhelm's School, July 19<sup>th</sup> 2010**

One of the highlights of the busy last week of the Summer term was the visit to St. Aldhelm's School by the newly-consecrated Bishop Moses from Wau Diocese in the Sudan.

At six foot seven inches tall this former Dinka tribesman made an impressive figure, especially during the impromptu basketball game with children prior to our outdoor act of worship.

Bishop Moses took Luke 2: 52 as his Biblical text, exploring with the children how Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favour with God and with His community in the context of His family's home in Nazareth. Back in Year 7's classroom, Moses fielded questions about his faith and his homeland.

The people of southern Sudan are continuing to rebuild the infrastructure of their region following a long civil war which lasted from 1983 until 2005 and which saw two million lives lost. Thousands of miles of dirt roads have to be cleared of mines and repaired, helping the 2 million internally-displaced people to make a homecoming. Bishop Moses spoke of how many Church leaders still preferred to travel between communities by bicycle, because this was less dangerous than using cars on mine-studded roads – it was simpler and safer to negotiate the latter by letting your front wheel follow the tracks of traveller's feet.

In 2005 a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was implemented, offering the hope of stability between the northern and southern regions of the Sudan. Autonomy was granted to the Southern Sudanese people, and in January 2011 a referendum is scheduled which might lead them to seek independence from the North. But the Khartoum -based government remains determined to exploit oil-rich stretches of Southern Sudan, a region that is still riven by inter-tribal conflict and is under pressure from the continuing humanitarian tragedy in Darfur province.

Christian leaders in southern Sudan have called upon the international community for a measure of protection: a return to war in the Sudan may well involve an escalation which could draw in nine Central African countries.

The Right Reverend Bishop Moses Deng Bol, was elected Bishop of Wau Diocese (part of the Episcopal Church in the Sudan) in October 2009. Bishop Moses was enthroned in March 2010 at Good Shepherd Cathedral in Wau. His diocese covers two out of the ten states that form the Southern Sudan.

Wau is one of the three disputed areas between the two main parties in the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Moses was born in 1976 in Warrap state, Sudan. He spent his childhood in a cattle camp and village where schools were non-existent. Children had no access to formal education and looked after cows. Moses became a Christian after a serious illness.

While receiving medical treatment he met a young evangelist who taught him to read and write in the Dinka dialect.

After learning Dinka, he started leading prayers in church, becoming an evangelist in 1994, attending Bible school and being formed for future church leadership.

In 1995, while travelling to Khartoum to seek better treatment, Moses was detained on suspicion of being a member of Sudan People's Liberations Army/Movement.

Today, promotion of peace is one of the major challenges for Bishop Moses and his colleagues in Wau Diocese.

Bishop Moses has a vision of a Diocese led by well-trained and experienced clergy, Mothers Union members, youth and Sunday school leaders and Church Council leaders.

He believes in a Church that encourages forgiveness, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence among the different tribal groups in Wau and in the wider Sudan.

One of our regular young congregation members Claudia Hill happened to be on placement in the Parish at the time of Bishop Moses' visit and this is her reflection:

*“ When speaking to the pupils about Luke 2:52 he described several dimensions to the verse, that we grow physically, spiritually and socially – and he spoke so compassionately that the pupils were drawn in.”*

Moses was the second Bishop that Claudia had ever met and she wondered if he was going to be very formal. But she was struck by his friendliness, his laughter and his hope for his country, even though he'd experienced the Sudan's suffering. *“All the stereotypes about how a Bishop might be expected to act went out the window when he started playing basketball with pupils.”* The latter were not only drawn to him, they stayed with them, asking questions.

During questions from Year 7, Claudia noticed that when Moses was asked about the Sudan's sufferings, he always spoke in a hopeful way.

*“He spoke about the way that everybody in the south of the Sudan went to church on Sunday – including the President and his cabinet.”*

Moses' body language and words reached out to everybody and by that he demonstrated his belief that we are all made in the image of God.