

Archbishop Stephen writes in the Yorkshire Post today, reflecting on the Coronation of King Charles III

Nearly seventy years since the last Coronation and after many busy months planning, the Coronation of King Charles III has arrived.

For most of us, this will be the first time we witness such an occasion. For others, they will remember exactly where they were in 1953, when our late Queen entered Westminster Abbey for her Coronation.

Whether you recall the launch of the Apollo in 1969, or the Live Aid concert in 1985 or the official opening of the London Olympic Games in 2012, these are occasions that build friendship and community around what becomes shared memory, and then the belonging and the shared story that goes with it. We connect with each other across the generations. From Trinity Market Hull to Piece Hall Halifax, from Dewsbury Library to Pontefract Castle – wherever you might be watching the Coronation this weekend or taking part in a volunteering activity– you are in good company, you become part of this shared story, a national story.

The Coronation itself is a remarkable piece of historical continuity, with its roots in Anglo Saxon rites. But with continuity also comes change. The start of the second Elizabethan era in 1952 came against the backdrop of a post-war period with a sense of looking ahead to a more prosperous time and over the next seventy years, society changed, technological advances dominated all our lives and Britain transformed as it was nudged from the late 20th century to the dawning of the 21st.

It is in this context today that King Charles III picks up the baton which has been passed to him. Throughout the Coronation service, in small but significant ways, we will see changes which acknowledge our current monarch's desire to reflect the diverse nation in which we live.

For the first time we will hear a short dialogue between the King and a child at the start of the service, establishing a theme of Christlike service. There will be inclusion of languages from around the British Isles. Other faith leaders will form part of the presentation of the Regalia and parts of the liturgy have been newly written. Further changes extend beyond the order of service and are reflected in the guests attending the service, drawn from all walks of life – many from voluntary organisations rubbing shoulders alongside the world's most powerful leaders.

Understandably, there are some who are intrigued about the nature of the Church of England taking such a central role. A Coronation espouses something of the relationship between Crown, Church and State. In common with his predecessors for almost 500 years,

The King is known as Defender of the Faith. This is part of his full formal legal title. As the Church of England is the established church, the monarch is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, which dates back to the 1558 Act of Supremacy, during the reign of Elizabeth I.

But whilst there are some firsts during the service, much of the liturgy, traditions and symbolism remain and would be instantly recognisable to previous monarchs. The anointing of the King is a deeply personal and intimate moment between the King and God. In the bible, anointing is seen as a sign that someone has been set apart for a special calling or purpose. The most famous Coronation anthem, Zadok the Priest, which will be heard today is based on the biblical account of Zadok's anointing of Solomon as King around 970 BC.

King Charles will be given a perfectly round orb, a symbol of the earth, with a cross standing over it. The cross is the sign of God's self-sacrificial

love for us as a human race and so, as the King receives the orb, he is reminded that he is to rule with a spirit of self-sacrifice, giving himself, his time, his influence, whatever it costs, for the good of his people. Moreover, how we are going to live peaceably on the earth is the most important issue facing our planet. This has always been a concern that is close to our new King's heart. The cross standing in the earth and above the earth points to God's rule of justice and peace, calling us to order our lives in ways that will foster harmony with one another and with the earth itself.

A book written for our late Queen's ninetieth birthday, is entitled 'The Servant Queen and the King she serves'. Continuing that life of service to God, the nation and the Commonwealth, it is King Charles who will commit himself today to a greater King, to Jesus Christ, the servant King. This is perhaps why, when he is crowned and enthroned, King Charles is not facing the people but the altar. It is to God that he commits himself, and in service of others.

Of course, our late Queen spoke a great deal about how her calling to be the Monarch was not at its heart a calling to power and might, but a call to serve. We may not always realise it, but this is a deeply Christian insight – that leadership is essentially about service – it is not ruling through fear, power, or dictatorship. And in our constitutional monarchy, the King is Head of State and above party politics, but even the name of our head of government, the Prime Minister, could be translated, the First Servant.

As I seek to play my own small part in this extraordinary occasion in which I find myself as the 98th Archbishop of York, I will in the Abbey be praying for our nation and for our common life. I will pray for our new King and the responsibilities that are laid upon him, for his Queen and all



own earthly Kingdom, we might also seek always after God's heavenly

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