

## Thoughts on the Coronation of Charles III



May 2023 will undoubtedly be remembered in history for the coronation of King Charles. Most of us will have found the event especially fascinating because we have no memory of any similar ceremony in our lifetimes. Only those well over 70 will recall the 1953 coronation and those memories will probably be vague or incomplete, not least because television sets were rare in those days.

The service in Westminster Abbey was a liturgical triumph. There was much pageantry, stunning music and a good deal of historical symbolism. Some elements were frankly anachronistic, such as equipping the king for battle with spurs and sword. Modern constitutional monarchs are no longer warriors.

Nonetheless, beyond the glittering pageantry, this was a religious rite that ratified Charles as a monarch who will be rooted in the Christian faith – and indeed within the Church of England. There were good, positive acknowledgements of other denominations and interfaith relations were incorporated in the service, but ultimately the coronation ritual made it plain: Charles is the defender of *our* faith – and the Church of England is still the established church in this land.

More importantly, the service emphasised the Christian vocation of the monarch. He or she is called by God to be the servant of the people, to promote equity and justice, to set an example to the nation and to work for its people. It is a sacred trust. Even a modern constitutional monarch, with little actual political power, can be looked upon as the protector of all that is just and right. These are our expectations of Charles, and they are more significant than all the pomp and pageantry attached to our monarchy.

Such expectations are time honoured. They go back to biblical times and are particularly embedded in the Old Testament, within the detailed annals of the rulers of Israel and Judah. The books of 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles all contain a wealth of information about rulers who were often brave, sometimes incompetent, frequently greedy, occasionally villainous but sometimes wonderfully holy and aligned to God's purposes. The unworthy kings who fell short were generally challenged about their misdeeds by God's prophets, who bravely reminded them that kingship was not just about power and riches, but also the pursuit of justice and giving priority to those who were poor and needy. These aspects of leadership reflected God's ancient guidance to his people, encompassed within the laws of Moses. Biblical kings were reminded that the monarchy was a living extension of God's covenant with his chosen people. Essential elements of these expectations still apply today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to all Christian monarchs.

We wish King Charles III a long and fruitful reign. He has made a promising start, following in the footsteps of his much-loved mother, and there is no indication that any modern prophet will be needed to challenge him to re-direct his path. Nonetheless, as faithful Anglicans we can do much to support him, and his Christian vocation, through our regular prayers.