

A message and invitation from our Patron, Mr Stan Klan

Her Majesty's Platinum Anniversary Thanksgiving Service.

Sunday February 6th 9am.

St Stephen's Uniting Church, Neil St.

A proposed Royal Tour of Australia in 1952 by the then Princess Elizabeth and her husband Prince Philip was cancelled when, in Kenya, the Princess received news of her father's death. On that day, 70 years ago, February 6th 1952, the Princess became Queen Elizabeth II and returned to England to prepare for the funeral of her father King George VI.

A visit to Australia was to follow the visit to Kenya, and one of the planned events of the aborted Royal Tour of 1952, was attendance by the Royal couple at Sunday morning worship on April 27th at St Stephen's Church in Neil Street, Toowoomba.

St Stephen's Church will mark both the planned visit and Her Majesty's platinum anniversary at the morning service on Sunday, February 6th.

The date is not only 70 years to the day that Her Majesty became our Queen, it is also the first day of my 6 month appointment as Interim Minister of St Stephen's Uniting Church, where I have been a lay preacher for almost 28 years.

The 9am service – at which I shall be the preacher - will be both a commemoration of that proposed visit in 1952, and a service of thanksgiving for 70 years of unapologetic Christian witness and servant leadership from Her Majesty the Queen.

You are cordially invited to join us for that special service of worship on Sunday February 6th.

Best wishes

Stan Klan

The Servant Queen: *Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee*

A sermon preached at St Stephen's Uniting Church Toowoomba

Feb 6th, 2022 by Mr Stan Klan, Interim Minister

Seventy years ago today, on the morning of February 6th 1952, King George VI died and the heir to the throne, the Princess Elizabeth, was in Kenya just six days into a Royal Tour of the Commonwealth countries. The Royal Tour was cancelled and the princess returned, with Prince Philip, to London to be welcomed as Queen Elizabeth II, whose platinum jubilee we celebrate today. We hail Her Majesty, the Queen of Australia, as the longest reigning monarch in the more than one thousand year history of the British monarchy. Her Majesty has reigned as Queen of Australia for well over half of our 121 year history as a nation, through 15 Australian Prime Ministers, 16 if you count the recycled one.

The cancelled Royal Tour of 1952 was scheduled to visit Australia, after Kenya, beginning in Fremantle on 1 March and concluding in Townsville on 1 May 1952. It included a visit to Toowoomba, with Her Majesty and the Duke of Edinburgh to attend worship here at St Stephen's Presbyterian Church in Toowoomba, on Sunday April 27th at the 11am service.

We all know that the Queen is the Supreme Head of the Church of England, so what was she doing planning to worship in a Presbyterian Church in Toowoomba, St Stephen's? *Common knowledge* has it that Her Majesty is the Head of the Church of England and **also** Head of the Church of Scotland, the mother church of Presbyterians throughout the world. The trouble with *Common Knowledge* is that while it may be common, it isn't always knowledge. In fact, Her Majesty *isn't* the *Head* of the Church of Scotland. The Church of Scotland asserts, as does the Uniting Church, that it has no head other than Jesus. It is true that Her Majesty **is** a **member** of the Church of Scotland and attends Church of Scotland church services, that is Presbyterian services, of worship, whenever she is in Scotland.

The Moderator of the Church of Scotland assists the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury at a royal coronation. As soon as the Princess Elizabeth became the Queen on her father's death – well before her formal and ceremonial Coronation in June 1953 – Her Majesty swore the required oath “to maintain the government, worship, discipline, rights and privileges of the Church of Scotland” as the result of a deal struck when the crowns of England and Scotland were unified under the Scots King James VI in 1601.

So Her Majesty is an Anglican and a Presbyterian, two Protestant Churches. No cognitive dissonance here. When I am in England I am a Methodist; when I am in America, I am a United Methodist; in Australia I am a Uniting Church man - why don't we have an adjective?

A Protestant Queen. We all know that Her Majesty is titled “Defender of the Faith,” a title inherited with the line of succession since the time of King Henry VIII. The cynic might conclude that a few monarchs in that line of succession over the centuries have not always quite lived up to the title, “Defender of the Faith.”

But, as my American friends say, “Here's the kicker!” King Henry VIII was given the title Defender of the Faith **not** for being a good Protestant but for **defending** Roman Catholic theology **against** the Protestants. Protestantism was the new-fangled religion of Martin Luther which had crept from Germany into England in the early 1520s, initially into Cambridge University.

History has so many jokes for us.

Henry VIII was a loyal son of the Roman Catholic Church and wrote a tract – an essay - in defence of Catholic argument that there are indeed seven Christian sacraments, not just the two espoused by Martin Luther, and observed by Protestants of all denominations to this day: Baptism and Holy Communion. Old Henry, still with his first wife at the time – said some very nasty things about Martin Luther: “a venomous serpent,” he called him, “a pernicious disease” and – I like this one: “Cerberus,” that’s the three headed dog that guarded the underworld in Classical mythology.

The Pope at the time, Leo X, was so impressed with King Henry VIII’s literary masterpiece attacking Protestantism, that he awarded him the title Defender of the Faith. Defending the Catholic religion against the Protestant heresy.

In the next decade when King Henry VIII fell out with the Pope – there is plenty in that story for another Sunday sermon – when Henry VIII fell out with the Pope and declared himself the Head of the Church in England, he kept the title. Defender of the Faith. The Defender of the Roman Catholic faith was now a severe critic of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. He’s now defending the Protestant religion against the Roman Catholic Church and its Pope.

I have already conceded that the throne has been occupied on occasion in the succeeding 500 years by some not entirely deserving of the title “Defender of the Faith.” I have no fear in asserting my belief that Her Majesty our Queen **does** deserve the title Defender of the Faith.

Queen Elizabeth II, Defender of the Christian Faith.

How can we gauge Her Majesty’s Christian faith? How can we determine what the Queen truly believes? Her public utterances in dozens of speeches a week are either written by somebody else or censored and approved by someone else.

The one speech which Her Majesty **does** compose herself, without minders or Prime Ministers censoring it, is her annual Christmas Day message. We never miss it.

When our kids are introducing me to their friends – and want to highlight my mild eccentricities - that say, “This is Stan, he’s my Dad.” Then behind their hands they add, “At the end of the Christmas Day message, he stands up for God Save the Queen.” The other one is, “He speaks German to the dogs”. Guilty, twice.

You can watch all the back numbers of the Queen’s Speech on YouTube. This is not a paid commercial.

Her Majesty’s very first Christmas Day message, in 1952, fell in the time between her coming to the throne and her formal coronation ceremony.

In that Christmas Day message in 1952 – I was two years old; most of you weren’t even yet born – In that first Christmas Day message in 1952, Her Majesty asked us, her subjects, for our prayers.

She said, “I want to ask you all, whatever your religion may be, to pray for me on the day of my coronation - to pray that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve Him and you, all the days of my life.”

To serve God and to serve her people all the days of her life – it doesn’t get much clearer than that.

Across those 70 years we have seen an ever greater willingness by Her Majesty to declare her personal Christian faith. A woman of conviction whose Commonwealth includes more Muslims and Hindus than it does Christians, is unapologetic in her declaration that Jesus is her Lord.

Across the decades when Britain and many members of the Commonwealth have become more secular, the Queen's annual Christmas messages have been unequivocal statements of her Christian faith.

Her Majesty used the year 2000AD Christmas message to celebrate the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus. After giving a brief overview of the life and teaching of Jesus, Her Majesty told a couple of billion people, of every religion and none, without apology: "For me, the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God, provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example."

That year, after saying those words in her Christmas Day message, Her Majesty received 25 times the normal volume of post-Christmas message fan mail. Her people clearly love her for her willingness "to give account for the hope that is within her," to quote the First Epistle of Peter.

In her 2013 Christmas message, Her Majesty spoke of the birth of Jesus in these words: "The Christmas message shows us that God's love is for everyone. There is no one beyond its reach."

In her 2014 Christmas message, Her Majesty said: 'For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people, of whatever faith or none.'

But Her Majesty doesn't just talk the talk; she walks the walk.

It's not **just** the formal act of washing the feet of homeless people on Maundy Thursday. In the year she turned 94 Her Majesty had over 300 official engagements in four different countries. The Queen is patron to 510 charities in Britain alone, including Cancer Research UK, the British Red Cross and Barnado's Homes. Her Majesty favours charities that tackle community and civic issues. Care for the sick and needy. A practical outworking of her Christian faith.

In March 2006 Kerrie and I were in Sydney for a Fairholme Old Girls' lunch. The US Secretary of State Ms Condoleezza Rice was also in Sydney that day. The whole CBD was in lockdown.

In November 2014, every shop and office in the Brisbane Central Business District was closed because US President Barack Obama was in town for the G20 summit. Helicopters and bullet proof limousines.

A couple of months later we stood with the crowds in front of Buckingham Palace in London to watch the Changing of the Guard. The big gates in front of the palace opened and out drove the 40 year old black Rolls Royce with Her Majesty sitting in the back, the window open, waving, and moving through the crowds of her people, without fear. No lockdowns; no helicopters; the traffic continued along the Mall, the old Rolls Royce amongst them.

St Luke tells us that “Jesus grew up in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” Her Majesty enjoys the favour of her people because of her life of sacrificial giving, and – I am sure – she enjoys the favour of God.

Today we give thanks to God for the life of selfless service, the life of Christian witness of our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth II, the Servant Leader, following in the footsteps of her acknowledged Servant Master, Jesus Christ.

You can tell a lot about a country by its National anthem. Well, not Spain or Bosnia: their national anthems have no words.

France’s national anthem has words, listen to them:

Grab your weapons, citizens!

Form your battalions!

Let us march! Let us march!

May impure blood

Fill our gutters.

Impure blood, (that’s the blood of non-Frenchmen, the blood of foreigners, inferior races.) And they call us racist.

Or listen to the words of Italy’s national anthem:

Mercenary swords, they’re feeble reeds.

The Austrian eagle has already lost its plumes.

The blood of Italy and Polish blood it drank,

Along with the Cossack. But it burned its heart.

Or the Algerian national anthem - this one is a doozy: Well, the French had murdered 25% of their population, non-French, inferior.

We swear by the lightning that destroys,

By the streams of generous blood being shed.

When we spoke none listened, so we have taken the noise of gunpowder as our rhythm.

Dr Google tells me ... our daughter Beth calls her Mrs Google, because she knows everything.... Google tells me that only four of the 193 United Nations member countries have National Anthems that are prayers. So, now we sing a prayer: it is number 578 in the Australian Hymn Book. Amen