Princess Elizabeth was staying in Kenya with Prince Phillip when she heard of the death of her father King George VI, on 6th February 1952.

She returned home to be proclaimed, ‘Queen Elizabeth II’ aged 25 and her succession to the throne was proclaimed at an Accession Council which took place in St James's Palace, attended by members of the Privy Council, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London.

Nine months later, Elizabeth II attended her first State Opening of Parliament where she read and signed her Accession Declaration.

Forty-five years ago, in a service of thanksgiving for the Queen’s Silver Jubilee, Dr. Donald Coggan, then Archbishop of Canterbury, opened his sermon at St. Paul’s Cathedral with some words from St Matthew’s Gospel:
Everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock.

This year, forty-five years later, we will, of course, be celebrating her Platinum Jubilee with an extra Bank Holiday, although today, 6th February 2022, is the actual seventieth anniversary of her accession to the throne.

The past seventy years have witnessed the most extraordinary changes in society, the State, in technology, in science, in the Church and, indeed, in the institution of monarchy itself.

But through all these changes and chances, Elizabeth II, by the grace of God, Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith, has remained a fixed point within our nation. A ‘still centre’, around which much has moved and shifted and turned.

A rock-solid reign built upon "the rock on which she stands": her Christian faith.

As Dr. Coggan pointed out in his sermon, in a world where much had changed and continued to change, foundations really matter, and the Queen’s reign has provided an international symbol of stability through decades of social, political and moral upheavals.

Any builder or architect will tell you that poor or shallow foundations make for short-lived and unstable buildings; they might make an immediate flashy impact, they might even catch the mood of a fleeting moment, but as the years unroll a building without well prepared, deeply dug foundations will, inevitably, begin to shift and move; its fabric quickly falling into decay, placing
its inhabitants in danger, and constantly facing the threat of demolition.

In the age of the quick fix, the shallow foundation, the age of spin, the sound-bite and media-fuelled superficiality, Her Majesty, the Queen, not only Defender of the Faith, but our patron here at St Marylebone, has remained a necessary stable and stabilising force in our nation and in the Commonwealth of Nations, of which she is also head.

Her Majesty the Queen has withstood the collapse of her children’s marriages, the deaths of her mother and sister and husband, an endless succession of governments, a continually changing and developing Commonwealth, a world pandemic and, through all these things and more, the Queen has remained a fixed and stable point of reference, making no apology for attributing her strength, her firm foundations, to her faith in Jesus Christ; an unshakeable trust in the God of love who has revealed himself to the world as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In her Christmas Broadcast in 2000, the Queen said this:

*For me, the teaching of Christ and my personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, draw great comfort in difficult times from Christ’s words and example. I believe that the Christian message, in the words of a familiar blessing, remains profoundly important to us all: Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage, hold fast that which is good, render to no man evil for evil, strengthen the faint hearted, support the weak, help the afflicted, honour all men.*
In an age of rampant materialism and rapacious self-interest, where any idea of national or civic duty is quickly rubbished in favour of an ‘everything-must-be-about-me’ take on life, in which the fleeting and the ephemeral hold sway, seventy years of faithful and dedicated service, rooted in Christ’s teachings, is hard not to admire, even by the most determined Republican.

With Christ as our rock, our cornerstone, the solid ground beneath our feet, each of can learn much from the Queen, who has committed herself to a life of duty and public service, humility and understatement, seeing her coronation as a life-long religious vocation and the coronation oaths to be unbreakable religious vows, vows which she, as the world's longest-serving head of state, continues to live out, faithfully.

Our task as Christina men and women, rich or poor, living in palaces for the tiniest of flats, is to strive faithfully and courageously to build, not just decent civil society but the Kingdom of God; a Kingdom in which every individual, of whatever race or creed or gender is treated with respect and dignity; a Kingdom in which duty rather than rights rules the day; a Kingdom in which opposites are reconciled, rather than that pitted against each other.

So today, as we give thanks for seventy years of service faithfully given to her realms and territories by Her Majesty, the Queen, may we remind ourselves that we too, as the fellow servants of Christ are, first and foremost, called to serve and not to be served; called to build on the firm foundation of Christ as our cornerstone; commissioned to transform the world around us into a society rooted in heaven, so that God’s Kingdom might be made known here on earth.
With deep thanksgiving, let pray God to Save our gracious Queen, and to grant that she may, trusting in God alone, be long to reign over us.

Amen.