Rejoice, Reflect and Renew: Cathedral celebration of Queen's reign

The Dean of Newcastle, the Very Revd Chris Dalliston, with the Lord Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, Nigel Sherlock. Right, members of the congregation of the service last month

PICTURES: KEITH BLUNDY / AEGIES ASSOCIATES

Newcastle’s St Nicholas’ Cathedral celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Queen’s accession to the throne at an augmented service of evensong last month.

The service was organised by the Cathedral at the request of the Lord Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, Nigel Sherlock, Esq, CBE, JP and was led by the Bishop of Newcastle, the Right Reverend Martin Wharton on the anniversary of the Queen’s accession to the throne sixty years ago on the death of her father, King George VI.

The Dean of Newcastle, the Very Revd Chris Dalliston, said in his sermon, “Of all the Kings and Queens of England only Victoria has celebrated a Diamond Jubilee and reigned for longer - so far. The coming months will see many acts of celebration - street parties, Flower Festivals, community events - not just because it’s a remarkable achievement by a remarkable person who at 85 continues to work and travel and speak - but because the monarch symbolises and holds the identity of the nation. In celebrating this great milestone we are also making some profound statements about our national life and identity.”

Calling on the congregation to rejoice, renew and reflect, he said, “As a nation we are in danger of corrupting our much-prized assets of understatement and irony and turning them into the less attractive characteristics of indifference and cynicism. So let’s try and use the opportunity afforded by this great anniversary to do something different.

There is much worthy of praise. Compared to millions in our 21st century world, we enjoy a good level of healthcare and everyone is given an education: we live lives of relative peace in a democracy that allows peaceful protest and frank, even outspoken debate. Very few go hungry, we try to protect the rights of minorities and we actively seek to ensure equality of opportunity; we are striving to build a society which enables freedom of religious expression and work hard to ensure that people of every background and culture are included in our national life. There continues to be a strong ethos of public service and communities are sustained and enriched by the commitment and often self-sacrifice of countless ‘ordinary’ (perhaps extraordinary) men and women. Much of this may be fragile, but all of this and much more deserve our recognition and rejoicing. And all of this is in some sense made possible by the stability we have enjoyed over 60 years and whether we recognise it or not, by the values that our Queen has lived by and spoken of and exemplified.

‘Of course, we can never for a second be complacent: while we shall be unlikely to return to the relentlessly upbeat tone of those 1950s newspapers we need to remain constantly vigilant of the freedoms we can easily take for granted. Particularly in times of economic difficulty, it is all too easy to start bewailing our misfortune and looking for someone to blame; a sense of fairness and the spirit of generosity can very quickly evaporate and we are painfully aware that the gap between rich and poor is growing rather than shrinking.’

Among those attending were clergy from around the north-east, representatives from other faith groups, local government, academia, the military and people from many other walks of life.

The service included prayers by the Lord Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, Nigel Sherlock, Esq, CBE, JP and was led by the Bishop of Newcastle, the Right Reverend Martin Wharton on the anniversary of the Queen’s accession to the throne sixty years ago on the death of her father, King George VI.

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