

## St George's Anglican Church Malvern

It might be touch and go whether there are now more imported Australian eucalypts or native olive trees in Israel. There are certainly olives everywhere, not just on the well known Mount of Olives east of the city of Jerusalem. When some of us were there recently I heard one of the Americans in our group ask our guide if people still make olive oil. When she was told they certainly did her only comment was, 'Oh my.'

It's easy to feel superior of course, we who have *learnt* to love olives and olive oil in recent years. Among Anglo-Celtic Australians it was not always so. I recall when olive oil was a strange and exotic liquid in a small bottle in the medicine cabinet of my childhood home. Looking back, I am not sure why it was bought or whether anyone ever used it. I don't believe it ever made it to the kitchen!

Olive oil, wine and grain were the three most important foods that people produced in biblical times. Olive oil was eaten with almost every meal. It was mixed with flour to make cakes, as in the story about Elijah and the starving widow and her son. A portion of the best olive oil from every village and town was sent to the Temple in Jerusalem for the lamps there. And the third pressing, the least quality oil, was used to light the lamps in people's houses. Olive trees and the oil from the olives symbolized fertility, beauty and usefulness. When the apostle Paul wanted to explain the inclusion of Gentiles in God's new covenant made through Jesus, the *Christos* meaning the anointed one, he said God had grafted the Gentiles onto the olive tree of Israel.

Olive oil poured on a person to anoint them conferred dignity. Kings were anointed; priests were anointed. Jesus who is prophet, priest and king is called 'anointed one, Christ as we say in English. The sovereign is anointed in the Coronation service. Those old enough to recall that day when Queen Elizabeth was crowned sixty years ago will know that the most solemn moment in the whole lengthy service was the anointing with oil.

The service was televised, a daring innovation back then, but that most solemn moment, the anointing was screened from everyone's view by a canopy. Surely, we think, the most important action in a coronation is the crowning and the enthroning; when the crown is placed on the sovereign's head and they are seated on the throne which they alone are entitled to occupy. But that is not so. The United Kingdom coronation service is closely modelled on the ceremonies that began a new reign for kings in Israel. The anointing is directly compared to the anointing of

Solomon, Israel's wise king. The prayer, 'God save the king,' comes from the first book of Kings which says, as Handel's glorious anthem has it,

Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king; and all the people rejoiced and said: God save the king; long live the king; may the king live forever. Amen. Alleluia.      *from 1 Kings 1.*

At its heart the coronation service is a covenant ceremony. The new monarch is consecrated by anointing and thus the monarch, the people and God are bound together in a new relationship. Anachronistic as the institution may seem to many these days, the monarchy exists as our source of order in civil society, duly authorised governance, and the impartial rule of law. The present Queen has for sixty years sought to foster the many means and associations by which anyone of any faith or none, may find an avenue to be of service to others and the common good. Nothing so reveals to us her royalty than her Christ like service, her giving of herself with Christ, to God and the world as neighbours, year in and year out, in good times and in difficult.

Shortly we will anoint Giselle with olive oil when she is baptized. That oil has been infused with fragrant balsam and blessed by the bishop during Holy Week, just for this one sacred purpose. Just as the title Christ, *Christos* means that Jesus is God's anointed one, so after today Giselle will have the new name of 'anointed one' Giselle Audrey Cecilia *Christos* Morrissy. Christians speak of Jesus as anointed by God's own Holy Spirit in his baptism in the river Jordan. It's a metaphor to help us understand how this one life, Jesus' life, death and resurrection, could so completely make God known to us. The Christian faith teaches that this is so, because the Church has learnt over the centuries that God shares God's own life with us as we share our lives with Jesus Christ. God enables us to pattern our lives on his. The first step in that lifelong growing into God is symbolized in baptism. In baptism we are promised a share in God's Holy Spirit who will remake us, away from the selfish and self absorbed patterns of the day, into the likeness of Christ.

When we emerge from the waters of baptism and are anointed we already share in our future glory with Christ as sharers in his prophetic, priestly, royal nature. We are forever bonded with the divine/human exchange which God has brought into existence in Jesus, flesh of our flesh *and* true God of true God. Baptism becomes a new beginning, a new birth into an eternal life we cannot create for ourselves and a welcome into a community wider than the family blessed with our natural birth, or who received us through adoption

Yes, people still make olive oil. They make it for nourishing our bodies, and for anointing them to symbolize that we belong not just to earthly kingdoms that rise and fall, but to God's kingdom which ultimately embraces all creation, just as God embraces Giselle in a new birth today.