

THE QUEEN'S 90 YEARS

As you know, the Queen keeps corgi dogs.

Picture 1 Here is a picture of her with James Bond and two of her corgis taken 4 years ago. Now then, I am going to ask the children to see how many corgis they can count in the next ten minutes. Some pictures are of other types of dog – so you have to be careful. And we'll see at the end if you got the right number of corgis, starting with the two in this picture. Are you ready? OK.

Picture 2 Some of you will be able to remember what you did on your 21st birthday. Maybe you celebrated with presents, a party, and cards with keys on, representing the freedom you now had as a full adult.

Picture 3 On her 21st birthday Princess Elizabeth spoke not about her new freedom, but about her duty which she vowed never to flee from. "I declare before you all" she said, "that my *whole life* whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service."

Picture 4 And as we look back today on her 90 years, who can deny that her whole life and long reign have been utterly dedicated to her people and nation? What an amazing record! That's royalty with loyalty.

Picture 5 The Queen's full title is Her Majesty Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and of Her Other Realms and Territories, Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Fount of Justice, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. She is also patron of over 600 organisations and charities.

Picture 6 While most of her contemporaries quit work for a life of gardening and Saga cruises thirty years ago, the Queen never settled down to a comfortable retirement. I'm not sure Prince Charles fully appreciates that! But she is surely this country's greatest public servant.

Picture 7 What is her secret? In December 2000 she has told us when she said: "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... have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example."

Picture 8 The Queen walks in the footsteps of Jesus: the King of kings (and queens) who also laid down *his* life in love and humble service of others.

Picture 9 I want us to think about that extraordinary blend of sovereignty and service, grandeur and graft, majesty and meekness. Because there's a reason we respond so positively to a reigning ruler who serves. We are spiritually hardwired to love it; because that's what God is like as seen in Jesus.

Picture 10 And so on this 90th birthday celebration we rejoice that the King of kings and queens is not a heavenly dictator or a remote character, uninterested in us. And nor is our Queen.

Picture 11 Some of you, I'm sure have met the Queen or been honoured by her in some way. She writes to those who make it to 100 and to 105. I remember Bel and Bill Simblet got a congratulations card from the Queen for their diamond wedding. One of her titles is "The Fount of Honours" and I can imagine how exciting it must feel to appear on the Queen's Birthday Honours List or get a congratulatory letter from her.

Picture 12 Yet however special that is, there's something much greater. The Queen can bestow honours on you, she can even make you a Lord or a Baron or a Dame. But she won't pass on to you her inheritance. She can't make you her child and turn you into a Prince or a Princess.

Picture 13 Even if you kiss a frog, she can't do it. She won't adopt you into the royal family and take you home to Buckingham Palace.

Picture 14 But Jesus adopts us into his Father's family if we have faith in him. That's what the Bible says. He can and does invite us to his heavenly home to take up residence forever.

Picture 15 People love to hear stories of royalty who come down from their thrones and mingle with ordinary people. Apparently on V. E. Day, Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret sneaked out and joined in the street celebrations in London. They wandered around anonymously in the crowds, enjoying the dancing and cheering along with everyone else.

Picture 16 I read once that the Queen still likes to get out incognito – perhaps to visit a West End show with Prince Philip sometimes. You can't blame her can you? I'm sure I wouldn't like to be caged up somewhere all my life, even if it was a house as nice as Buckingham Palace.

Picture 17 So we like to hear about our royals joining us commoners. The ultimate riches to rags story is in the Bible. We have read fairy tales of Princes becoming paupers but the Bible says that the King of kings humbled himself, indeed emptied himself.

Picture 18 It says "Christ Jesus made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!"

Picture 19 From heaven to earth, he became a tiny embryo in Mary's womb. And then a wriggling baby lying on straw. And then a refugee with no rights, on the run from Herod. And then a builder's labourer. And then a penniless preacher. A homeless man. A low-ranked servant.

Picture 20 Yet he descended even further to be a victim of cruelty and prejudice. And laying down his life in sacrifice – dying a lonely death on the cross. Never has anyone so majestic become so meek. And he did it for you.

Picture 21 For almost 2,000 years the church has used a simple phrase to describe the Christian message. It says: Jesus became what we are, so that we might become what he is.

Picture 22 Jesus is the true 'Fount of Honours' and he can bring you into the ultimate Royal Family.

Picture 23 But His invitation is RSVP – it needs a response. We live in a broken world with broken hearts and broken lives. We have to acknowledge that we are estranged from God's family. We have to accept that we need the royal pardon that Jesus offers.

Picture 24 It's something the Queen articulated so beautifully in 2011. She spoke of our need for Jesus – and for forgiveness. She said this:

Picture 25 "Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves – from our recklessness or our greed.

Picture 26 God sent into the world a unique person – neither a philosopher nor a general, important though they are, but a Saviour, with the power to forgive.

Picture 27 Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love."

Picture 28 What a preacher our Queen is! Do you have room in your life for the love of God through Christ our Lord? He offers it to you, to forgive *all* sins, to reconnect you to the Father, to adopt you into the life and love of God.

Picture 29 The Ultimate Sovereign became the Ultimate Servant for us. Our servant Queen said recently: "It is my prayer that we may all find room in our lives for the love of God through Christ our Lord." Elizabeth trusts Jesus as her Saviour. I wonder if you do today?

Right – how many corgis? (There are 25 and that's how old Princess Elizabeth was when she became Queen).