

I think we've looked at this point before, but it's worth looking at again. People always ask: Is the gospel account of the three kings or the three magi true? Or the shepherds and the angels and all the trappings of the Nativity... are they true?

Wrong question. It's like asking: is a sunset true? Is a symphony true? Are the paintings of Rembrandt true?

The gospels do not require intellectual agreement – they don't require us to decide 'yes, they're true' or 'no, they're not true'.

What the gospels require is not an agreement of the mind but a *response* of the heart... just as a sunset or a symphony or Michelangelo's Pietà – or, come to that, a rock concert – bring out a response in us.

When the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was asked: 'What *is* the world?' he answered; 'The world is everything that is the case.' Like most philosophers he got things half-

right. The world around us is indeed everything that is the case; but, the world each one of us *inhabits* is everything that is the case *and* our personal response to it. And since our personal response will be different from everyone else's, we will inhabit a different world from everyone else. So, we can actually talk about 'my world'... because I'm the only one who lives in it.

Like everything in the gospels, the story of the three kings or wise men requires a response. Over the centuries some of them have been extraordinary and have enriched us all: from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* and Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* to Fra Angelico and the iconographers of Greece and Russia. T.S. Eliot's famous poem *The Journey of the Magi* (which I read at the beginning) was his response to the gospel passage we heard today.

But what if our name isn't Fra Angelico or Bach or Berlioz or Eliot?

Doesn't matter in the slightest. Our response would be no less meaningful than theirs, no less important, no less acceptable to God; in fact, if the Lord's preferences in the gospels are anything to go by, he would be more delighted with the personal responses of his *anawim* – the little ones, the small, ordinary and the unimportant – than with any number of Bachs Eliots. In God's eyes, there is nothing and no one insignificant or ordinary. I find that hard to believe about myself. Maybe some of you do, too. It's even harder to believe it of other people sometimes – but to believe it – that nothing is insignificant to God – would be a great way of responding to the meaning of the Epiphany.