

[6] *The first session is about wonder. Specifically, the wonder that the various characters in Luke's account of Christmas show or feel. What do you mean by wonder? I think you use it in a rather broad and very interesting sense.*

RW: It is about taking delight in the goodness of life, the wonder of life. It's about things that are beyond us - things that grab our attention. It may be a beautiful sunset, or it might be something very different, but it grabs our attention and it helps us to see ourselves in the bigger light, in a bigger picture. One of the - I particularly love statistics, and I also have quite an interest in astronomy, and one of the things that causes me to wonder is that the Voyager 2 satellite, that went around the various planets of the solar system, and has now reached the edge of the solar system - it's been travelling at nearly a million miles a day, and it has taken 37 years to reach the edge of the solar system; and if it carries on to the nearest star it will take 44,000 years. And it just makes me marvel at the sheer size and wonder of it all.

[7] *We asked our contributors whether they'd experienced wonder at all - and if so what had caused it.*

George: Only nature, I would say. When I was in the Antarctic certainly, I would gaze at wonder at the topography, the landscape, and wonder: is this all part of God's great plan?

Maria: Everything's a wonder, isn't it? Every day. When you see a tree's budding, when you see a flower blossom, when you see the sunrise, sunset - everything's a wonder.

Andrew: Yes. I think another example - and it's probably something that many parents can relate to - I distinctly remember the first time that my wife and I went to a pre-natal scan, and I saw images of our daughter, Hannah - some 21 years ago. And I think any parent will understand the sheer astonishment and wonder that comes at that moment.

What do you think of those then?

RW: Great, yes. And if I can add my own, from a very different perspective, I was watching the other day the *Bake Off Sport Relief* and Clare Balding was telling us about children in Africa - about a disabled child, nine-year-old, unable to walk. And in that community disability is rejected - so had been rejected by everyone apart from her mother, who had to carry her everywhere - not allowed to go to the school, because she was disabled; no friends, because she was disabled. And *Sport Relief* had got her into a mixed-ability school that was there. It was only, I think, £30 a term for her to be there. But the picture of her, two or three days after being in that school - learning with others, playing with others - the look on her face was so wonderful. It was wonderful - and causes you to give thanks to God for human ingenuity which has brought about the possibility of hope in her life.

[8] *Yes. I want to just come back to the Christmas story if I can, and the wonder of the angels, the wonder of the wise men, the wonder of the shepherds - all of those. Is that the same, do you think, as the sort of wonder that we get from more ordinary things than the birth of Christ?*

RW: Yes, it is seeing beyond the immediate and beyond the mundane. And seeing a greater dimension to life, and seeing that we cannot understand it, we cannot predict it, but it takes us up and out of ourselves - and as a Christian it gives us cause to praise God for his goodness, and for his generosity. And, in the story of the shepherds and the angels - the experience of the shepherds of these angelic hosts in the skies is enough to knock the socks off any of us, but the other wonder is that it happened to shepherds: the least religious - the least likely. And that's part of the wonder of the Christian faith, that God's - God comes in surprising places and to surprising people. Rarely, if ever, to the predictable.

[9] *Throughout the course you return to the importance of worship. You just mentioned it there, as a response to God - indeed, our response to the coming of Christ. Can you make that connection between the wonder, and maybe the anxiety as well, which you mention in the text, of God's presence and worship? What is the connection between those two? Why the emphasis on worship?*

RW: Because God *is*. It's important to recognise that we don't worship God because he's got a weak ego and needs boosting up every day by as many people as possible. But rather, it's a reminding ourselves of the reality of the world that we live in. To me, it's rather like a blind person finding their way down the street, and perhaps rehearsing to themselves - you know, nine paces and then there's a lamp post on the right, and three paces and there's a kerb: they're reminding themselves of the reality in order to get to where they want to get to. And worship is reminding us of the reality that there is

a God who has made everything there is. A God who has made us. A God, wonderfully, who loves us, cares for us and knows us. So worship is opening our eyes to unseen reality which, in our busy-ness, we can so often forget about.

So worship's for us rather than for God is it?

RW: It is, yes. It is an expression of our engagement with the reality of the world that is. But God delights in our worship because God - because God is love. And God loves us, and God wants to relate to us, and to communicate with us. And worship is a way in which we can express our praise to God. And we can also be quiet and listen to what God has to say to us.

[10] *You do go on to say that we shouldn't be afraid of God's presence, and that we may best be conscious of him when we're being still. Why do you think that's the case?*

RW: Simply because our minds and our bodies are so active, and we live in a very active, very busy world, where people seem to think that busy-ness is a great sign of life. Whereas I think stillness is a greater sign of life - and that can often be scary. And many people fear being quiet, fear stopping - often feel the need to have music, or some noise of some sort. But it is in the stillness that we get in touch with some of the deeper things - some of the darker things. The monastic tradition would say that if you're going to be really serious and be still, go on a retreat. You must expect quite a battle with dark things that you have suppressed and buried in your busy-ness.

That's very interesting, yes.