

Jesus, have you been here before?
November 25, 2018

I really got a kick out of our Israeli guide.
He was Jewish by heritage but Christian by faith.



I'll never forget what he said while we were standing in front of the Eastern Gate.
Of the 8 gates that punctuate the wall around Old Jerusalem, the Eastern Gate is the most sacred.
It leads directly to the temple mount (currently occupied by the Dome of the Rock).

Many Jews and Christians believe this is the gate through which Messiah will enter Jerusalem.

Listen to Ezekiel (from chapters 40, 43)
In visions of God, he took me to the land of Israel . . .
and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze . . .

The man brought me to the gate facing east,
and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east.
His voice was like the roar of rushing waters,
and the land was radiant with his glory . . .
He said: "Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet.
This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.

OK, fast forward about 500 years from Ezekiel's writing.
This Eastern Gate is the gate through which Jesus rode on a donkey on Palm Sunday,
although the actual gate is buried
below the current city and gate
This Eastern gate was rebuilt in 540 years after Jesus
and then sealed in 1540 (1000 years) by the ruling Ottoman Empire
who hoped to prevent the Messiah from entering Jerusalem.

What does that say about this empire?
One, they were certainly afraid of the Messiah.
Second, they thought that 16-feet of cement would be an obstacle. Whatever . . .

Anyway, the Jews are still waiting
for Messiah to come through this gate at his *first* coming;
Christians anticipate he will enter through it as his *second* coming.

I asked our guide,

“Does this strong difference of opinion cause you lots of trouble with your Jewish friends?”
and he said,

“Not at all. I just don’t argue about it.

When Jesus comes through the gate, we’ll simply ask him,

“Is this your first visit, or have you been here before?”

I love his attitude – we don’t have to fight about this;

Someday it’ll all get cleared up!

But I love the question, “Jesus, have you been here before?”

I hope by the end of today you will realize that the witness of Scripture suggests
he’ll say, “**Yes, he’s been here before . . . but not just *once* before.**”

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, advent meaning “the arrival of a notable person.”

In this case, Jesus – born as a baby,

God-incarnate in human flesh.

The celebration of when, in the words of John,

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have beheld his glory, the glory of the one and only Son,

who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

But to this Jesus, I ask, “Have you been here before?”

To answer that question I take you to another tourist site

on our journey through the Holy Land:

Mt. Horeb, also known as Mt. Sinai, is located in the lower Sinai Peninsula.



St Catherine’s Monastery
at the foot of Mt. Horeb



This Monastery is said to be the guardian of . . .

drum roll . . . the burning bush.



OK, so it's not quite how I pictured it from my Sunday School days.

I see it more like this . . .



So do I really think this is the same bush from 4,000 years ago????

Nevertheless, it served as a poignant visual reminder of a powerful revelation in history.

Here's how the story goes:

Exodus 3

There the angel of the Lord appeared to [Moses] as fire flaming out of a bush. When he looked, although the bush was on fire, it was not being consumed. So Moses decided, "I must turn aside to look at this remarkable sight.

Why does the bush not burn up?"

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush: Moses! Moses!

He answered, "Here I am."

God said: Do not come near!

Remove your sandals from your feet,
for the place where you stand is holy ground.

I am the God of your father,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.

I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers,
and I am concerned about their suffering.

So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians
and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land,
a land flowing with milk and honey

Moses replied ...”When I...say to them,
‘The God of your ancestors sent me to you.’
What if the people say, ‘What is his name?’ What should I tell them?

Then God said to Moses, “I am who I am.
When you go to the people of Israel, tell them, ‘I AM sent me to you’”

What name does God give to Moses?
I AM. – The verb of BEING.

He is not saying that he is a being among other being.
He is saying he is “**BEING**” itself.

It is written in Hebrew with consonants **YHWH** (without vowels).

יהוה Yod He Vav He, read from right to left.

Since it has no vowels, no one really knows exactly how to pronounce it.
Because after the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BC,
the Jews decided the name was too sacred to be spoken, and so they just
called it, “the name.”

A guess at the pronunciation which has come into common usage is Yahweh.
You may say, “**I’ve read the Old Testament many times,
and I’ve never seen the word Yahweh.**”

You’re right.

It’s because the translators decided to write it like this: LORD (All caps, but smaller ORD)
Have you seen that? Of course.

In the translation we miss so much that I assure you the Jews of Jesus day didn’t miss.

So, Jesus and the religious leaders are talking (John 8:57-59)

Jesus says, “Abraham saw my day and was glad.

The Jews replied,

‘You have never seen Abraham!

You are not even fifty years old.’

Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, before Abraham was, I am!’

Well, you might say, “Oh, he was just using a figure of speech.”

He wasn’t really claiming to be the Yahweh, the I AM of the Old Testament.

Oh, he certainly *was*. And this wasn't lost on his listeners!
When Jesus said this, the people picked up stones to throw at him. ...”
(as in stone him to death for blasphemy)

Jesus made it abundantly clear that he was claiming to be the I AM.
Just read the seven “I AMs” Jesus claims of himself in the gospel of John alone:

I am the bread of life.
I am the light of the world.
I am the door of the sheep.
I am the good shepherd.
I am the resurrection and the life.
I am the way, the truth, and the life.
I am the true vine.

So, who spoke to Moses from the burning bush?
I AM, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Who does Jesus claim to be?
I AM

That's the story of the burning bush!
And a burning bush – what splendid picture of Jesus, God-incarnate.

A bush, made of wood, the fragile stuff of created matter,
fused with the essence of God in flames of fire, yet not consumed.
A human body, made of the fragile stuff of created matter
fused with the living God and yet not consumed.

And so I would ask you, Jesus of Nazareth, “Have you been here before?”

And I hear him say,
“Before Abraham was I AM.”

When this implication of this begin to dawn on you,
we suddenly get Jesus' words to the religious leaders:

You study the Scriptures diligently
because you think that in them you have eternal life.
These are the very Scriptures that testify about me. **John 5:39**

If the I AM is the God of the Old Testament, and Jesus is the Great I AM,
then the entire Old Testament speaks of Jesus.
He is I AM-incarnate.

By the way, we throw around the word incarnate like we all know what it means.

Carnate is the Greek root **carno**

From that, Spanish people eat “**carne**” the flesh of the animal.

The word “**carnivorous**” means animals that eat flesh.

The word “**carnage**” describes the slaughter of people (human flesh)

The word “**carnal**” refers to the desires of our bodies, our flesh.
which run wild at “**carnivals**”.

So IN-carnate means to put something INto human flesh.

In this case, The Great I AM himself.

Now for some of you, this is ho-hum.

Yah, yah, yah. I’ve heard this since I was a kid in Sunday School.

Jesus is God-incarnate.

It seems like an academic exercise.

But for some of you, declaring that Jesus is the Great I AM of the Old Testament

The one who spoke to Moses out of the bush,

is about real life and relationships at their deepest level.

We are going to let the Word of God speak for itself this morning

with the help of two in our church family who understand

that declaring Jesus is the Great I AM

is not just academics. (Lucy and Aparna)

Aparna is going to read a Scripture from the Old Testament that speaks of the LORD

Is the Yod He Vav He in Hebrew, which is the I AM

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

who spoke to Moses in the burning bush.

And then Lucy is going to read a Scripture from the New Testament that speak of Jesus.

May the Great I Am reveal himself to our hearts and minds.

JESUS IS THE GREAT I AM

THE LORD

Love the LORD, your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him,
for he is your life and length of days.

Deuteronomy 30:20

JESUS

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Colossians 3:3-4

THE LORD

You are My witnesses," says the LORD, "that I am God. Indeed, before the day was, I am He; And there is **no one who can deliver out of my hand.**

Isaiah 43:13

JESUS

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish,
and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

John 10:28

THE LORD

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Psalm 27:1

JESUS

"Again, Jesus spoke to them, saying, **'I am the light of the world.'**"

John 8:12

THE LORD

"You are the LORD, you alone. **You have made heaven**, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.

Nehemiah 9:6

JESUS

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth . . .

all things have been created through him and for him.

Colossians 1:15-16

THE LORD

Everyone who **calls on the name of the LORD** will be saved;
Joel 2:32

JESUS

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. . . . **For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'**"
Romans 10:9, 13

THE LORD

Then the LORD said to Moses, "My presence will go with you, and **I will give you rest.**"
Exodus 33:14-15

JESUS

Jesus: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest.**"
Matthew 11:28-30

THE LORD

Who is this **King of glory**? The LORD, strong and mighty, the Great I AM, mighty in battle!
Psalm 24:7-10

JESUS

My brothers and sisters, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the **Lord of glory.**
James 2:1

THE LORD

Oh come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.
For He is our God,
And we are the **people of His pasture,**
And the **sheep of His hand.**
Psalm 95:6-7

JESUS

"I am the **good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
John 10:11

THE LORD

“This is what the LORD says— Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:
I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

Isaiah 44:6

JESUS

John says: "When I saw him [Jesus], I fell at his feet as though dead.

But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, **I am the first and the last, and the living one**"

Revelation 1:17-18

THE LORD

This is what the LORD says,

Before me **every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.**

Isaiah 45:14, 23

JESUS

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that **at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord** to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

**If Jesus is *not* the Great I AM,
The Yod He Vav He who spoke to Moses from the burning bush,
then he is the ultimate imposter and needs to be put away.**

**But if Jesus *is* the Great I AM, the voice from the burning bush,
and he has indeed been here before
then we must bow down and worship him.**