

Before Abraham was, I am.

I am: the first person singular of the verb-to-be,

sum in Latin, *'εἰμι* in Greek, יהוה, *YHWH* in Hebrew.

YHWH - now where have I heard that before?

Way, way back many centuries ago Moses watching his flock

in Sinai attends to a bush fire only to be surprised by God.

Not just any old god but **the** God, who commands him

to lead his people from slavery to a land of promise,

flowing with milk and honey - and jaffa oranges.

Give me your name, your USP, your trademark, pleads Moses.

YHWH, I am, God replies, the quintessence of all existence.

Hijacking the verb-to-be, a name so sacred that henceforth

it was blasphemy to utter it, only the consonants spelled out.

Also bringing God into every conversation,

I am tired, I am hungry, I am happy, I am bored:

YHWH tired, YHWH hungry, YHWH happy, YHWH bored.

Cue Jesus in John's Gospel. Before Abraham was, YHWH.

YHWH the good shepherd, YHWH the way, truth and life,

YHWH the true vine, YHWH the bread of life

YHWH into everything, willing life in all its fullness.

YHWH into death too, because when they come to the garden

seeking to arrest Jesus, he says *I am he* - YHWH he -

and all the soldiers fall to the ground in terror.

YHWH in the victim, YHWH nailed up on the cross:

'Truly this man was the son of God', droned John Wayne

playing the centurion in *the Greatest Story Ever Told*.

'For goodness sake, John, say it with awe,'

the producer implored, at his wit's end.

'Aw, Truly this man was the son of God.'

Which says it all, really, heartfelt sympathy for the victim: aw!

Along with a deep sense of the numinous, awe-in-the-midst:

Bow your head, take off your sandals,
you are standing on holy ground, because YHWH is here.

YHWH impaled in suffering, weeping copious tears.

But not being constrained or defeated by it:

YHWH the resurrection and the life,

pointing to the day when all those crucified by life

will feast on milk and honey and Jaffa oranges,

and all crucifiers will have I-am, YHWH, to answer to:

Whilst Herod rages still from his dark tower

Christ clings to Mary, fingers tightly curled,

The lambs are slaughtered by the men of power,

And death squads spread their curse across the world.

But every Herod dies, and comes alone

To stand before the Lamb upon the throne. (Malcolm Guite)

Before Abraham was, before Herod was, before Putin was:

I am.