



It finally happened.

What was promised by God to Abraham, although he would not have understood what would happen.

What had been mentioned by prophets over millennia had happened.

When it happened, it was not in a way expected.

The Messiah had been born, not in a palace but in a stable, surrounded by muck, and to a woman who would have been considered common by many. He was laid in a manger, a food container for animals, and not in a comfortable cot, covered in soft fabrics.

Soon after, He was a refugee, fleeing from being murdered on the orders of King Herod who feared what His birth meant.

He was raised in a carpenter's workshop – a tradie – which is what He was. A common man, it would seem, but far from common, for He was Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, sent by His Father, for one specific purpose, to provide a way – The Way – for humankind to receive salvation and redemption for its sins.

It would be thirty years before Jesus began the steps that led to His becoming the Way. First. He had to become an adult in the eyes of the people he lived among. That was thirty years old among the Jewish people.

Jesus announced His ministry in the world in Nazareth, the town where He grew up, in the synagogue where He read from Isaiah 61: 1-2 –

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

This was Jesus’ public announcement of His ministry. Several weeks earlier He had approached His cousin John the Baptist who was standing in the Jordan River, baptizing all who came to repent of their sins. After the baptism, Luke records in 3.21-23 –

*<sup>21</sup> Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”*

In modern terminology, this can be seen as God’s commissioning of Jesus, His Son, for His ministry. It was public but it was not understood by anyone but John the Baptist, sent to prepare the way for Jesus.

On that day in Nazareth the reaction of those gathered in the synagogue was fury. This carpenter had dared to proclaim that He was the one promised by God. They wanted to kill Him for blasphemy. It would not be the only time.

Jesus was sent to save humankind however He could not do it alone. His time in the world was finite. He had only a short time to achieve what He was sent to do for He had to die for the reason He was born would otherwise be negated.

It is often said “Out of sight, out of mind.”

Once Jesus was gone from the world, out of sight, His words would be soon forgotten unless there were people who would continue to speak of Him and His message. Jesus had to build a team to carry on. And what a team He built! Jesus is the greatest team builder in history.

For the next part of this sermon, I am indebted to A Man Called Peter, although not the Peter of Jesus’ time.

His name was Peter Marshall. He was one of the greatest preachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Born in humble circumstances in Scotland he would become the Chaplain of the United States Senate. His story would be made into the movie, *A Man called Peter*, adapted from the biography written by his widow, Catherine Marshall. The role of Peter Marshall was given to Richard Todd and was one of his two greatest roles. The other was *The Dam Busters*, a true story of World War 2, and there could not be two very different roles.

In one of his most imaginative sermons, *Disciples in Clay*, Peter Marshall spoke of what the verdicts could have been if the disciples had appeared before a selection committee.

Let us consider what a modern selection committee might have thought and, at this point I am adding into that sermon.

Peter, uncouth fisherman, impulsive, middle-aged, smelling of fish. And he blusters. He could be given to swearing.

James and John, also fishermen however they are not modest and are boastful. They have loud voices. Oh my, they have the nickname, “the sons of thunder,” because of those loud voices. They are not patient men.

Matthew, hmm, a tax collector, probably dishonest and he works for our oppressors.

Judas Iscariot – well-educated and connected. Good with money.

Of the four men, probably only Judas Iscariot might have been chosen.

Jesus chose twelve men of different backgrounds. Of these, it was the fishermen who would become the three men who would become His closest confidants. One would be martyred, that was James, however Peter and John would be two of the most influential of the men He chose.

The imaginary selection committee would have had these men come in for an interview after they had submitted a written application.

Not so Jesus. He took a stroll along the banks of Lake Galilee to select Peter, James, and John, and Andrew, Peter’s brother, perhaps the only one of the disciples He may have met. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist who told him to follow Jesus – which meant leaving him. John knew that when Jesus arrived that his own ministry would diminish.

Jesus gradually built His team. He passed by Matthew, then known as Levi, working in his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said (Luke 5:22-23), and Matthew did. Ultimately, he would write the Gospel of Matthew.

And what of Judas Iscariot?

For Jesus' ministry to be successful, He had to die. He had to be betrayed from someone in His inner circle. Jesus would have known this when He chose Judas. Yet, He never let on until the Last Supper, when He said, reclining at the table with the Twelve, as Matthew tells us in 26:21 – *“I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.”*

As Matthew continues the story, the disciples were sad, and each asked the question, “Surely not I, Lord?” Judas also asked the same question. Jesus replied, “Yes, it is you.” And so, it happened. Judas went to the Jewish authorities who paid him 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

It was the beginning of the end of Jesus' ministry in the world. Within 24 hours He would be dead. So too, would Judas be dead, committing suicide. He would not be missed.

Jesus was missed. He was missed for the wrong reasons. He was expected to be a political Messiah who would rid Palestine of the Roman occupiers. All who heard Him had missed the point. They had misunderstood the prophets. They had not seen that Jesus had come for all humankind, not just the Jews.

Jesus would not have been missed by the Sanhedrin. They would have been deeply satisfied that Jesus was dead; that the threat to their livelihoods and lives was gone.

Yet, strange things had happened. There had been darkness over the land for hours. An earthquake had occurred. Dead people had risen from the grave. And the curtain that separated the altar from the people had been torn in two. Then had come a further shock. The stone that closed off the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid had been rolled away and the body was missing.

More shocks would come as people reported that they had seen Jesus. The team Jesus had built had gathered in mourning when Mary Magdalene rushed. “The Lord is alive! Soon after Jesus appeared to the disciples. He remained with them for forty days, giving His team their final training.

A few weeks on came the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all gathered in worship. It was the public commissioning of His team – Team Jesus.

What a team! We only know of the deeds of a few. We read of them in the Book of Acts, and in the Epistles that make up most of the New Testament. The Word spread far and wide.

Gospel John writes:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

This was the promise made to Abraham, that he would be the father of nations. It was the prophecy made by Isaiah in the reading:

*<sup>2</sup> The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.*

Did you note the mention of Galilee in the reading from Isaiah 9?

Isaiah lived around 900 years before Jesus was born. Through Isaiah, God made known that Jesus would come from Galilee.

It was from Galilee that Jesus selected the first of His team – Peter, Andrew, James, and John – fishermen to of whom would be key people in the spread of the Word among the peoples of their time. I speak of Peter and John. James would be martyred by Herod Agrippa I.

Andrew is said to have spread the Word around the Black Sea and into now what is Ukraine. He is also believed to have brought Word to Scotland which is why he is considered the patron saint of Scotland. The Scots flag is the X shaped cross that forms part of the Union Jack of Britain. It is claimed that St Andrew was crucified on such a cross somewhere near the Black Sea.

Whether the story of St Andrew is truth or legend matters little. It is illustrative of how far and wide the good news of Jesus was spread in the ancient world, long before modern communications technology. It was meant to be spread and it occurred because of Team Jesus.

What about today?

Each of us here in this room, and those watching from afar, if we, and they, have truly accepted Jesus into our hearts, are members of Team Jesus.

We may not feel strong enough in our faith and in ourselves to consider ourselves as being so. I know I did not when I first came to faith, now almost 28 years ago. I recall saying to the vicar at the church where I would spend 22 years, that I had no confidence in myself as someone who could speak about Jesus. His words still resonate with me. “Each time you walk into a church, you make a statement of faith. Perhaps

someone who knows you will wonder and, one day, follow you.”

Team Jesus began 2000 years ago, when Jesus began His ministry in Galilee. Although He is no longer with us in the flesh, His spirit is still with us in our endeavors in the world. This church is a local outpost of Team Jesus, His ministry is still in operation here.

As of June 2022, there are 6,209 churches in Australia. It has been said that there are 37 million churches in the world, with 50,000 being added each year. Each of these churches are outposts of Team Jesus. So let us not be discouraged.

Once long ago, the prophet Elijah became discouraged and depressed. He ran away to a mountain in a desert where God found him deep in depression. God reassured Elijah that He, God, still had 7,000 believers in Israel. He called them the remnant. It is said that there are 2 billion Christians in the world today. That is more than a remnant.

We are not alone. Team Jesus is alive and kicking.

I will end with a prayer.

*Lord God of the nations,  
we have seen the star of your glory rising in splendor;  
may the brightness of your incarnate Word  
pierce the night that covers the earth,  
signal the dawn of justice and peace,  
and beckon all nations to walk as one in your light.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,  
whom lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever.*

**Amen**