

Good morning!

This is IBC with breaking news from Jerusalem.

Reports are coming in that the body of Jesus of Nazareth, the controversial religious figure called 'The Christ' by some, whose arrival last week in the city had caused some commotion and who was executed on Friday on orders from Governor Pontius Pilate, has disappeared from the heavily-guarded tomb it was laid in, belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Some people are saying that he has been resurrected.

Jesus had been accused of blasphemy by the Jewish High Priest, Caiaphas, and sedition against the Roman Empire. After a brief appearance before King Herod on the blasphemy charges he had been sent back to Governor Pilate to be tried under Roman law. Witnesses say Jesus appeared alone and offered no defence, speaking only once. The witnesses were unable to hear clearly what he said, but it is thought that he confirmed the charges against him read out by Pilate. He was found guilty and sentenced to death by crucifixion.

In accordance with Passover tradition allowing a pardon to be granted to one prisoner, Pilate sought to commute the sentence, but when he made the proposal to a large crowd gathered in Jerusalem for the festival they surprisingly demanded that Barabbas, a known terrorist, be released instead. Several priests were seen moving among the crowd, and it is suspected they may have been orchestrating the move to have Barabbas freed instead of Jesus.

The sentence was carried out swiftly at Golgotha, where Jesus was executed alongside two other criminals. He was already so weakened from prolonged beatings that he was unable to carry his own cross to the place of the crucifixion, as is normal practice, and a young man from the crowd, named Simon, had been made to carry it for him. It is not known whether he had any previous connection to Jesus.

Crucifixion victims have been known to take several days to die, but Jesus did so in only a few hours. After his death was confirmed by a spear being thrust into his side, he was swiftly removed from the cross so he could be buried before sunset and the beginning of the Sabbath.

There was little time to make formal preparations, but Pilate released the body to Joseph of Arimathea, who placed it in an unused tomb thought to be intended for his own use.

Armed guards were placed outside the tomb to ensure there could be no interference with it, either by Jesus' followers or enemies.

Early this morning Jesus' mother, Mary, and another woman, also named Mary, from among his followers went with oils and spices to anoint the body. Arriving shortly after first light they found the tomb unguarded and open. An unknown man dressed in white was seen talking to them before they departed in a hurry.

They returned shortly afterwards with two men, one believed to be Peter, thought to be the leader of Jesus' followers. He entered the tomb, but found only empty burial cloths and no body, and the group left again soon after.

News of the body's disappearance has spread quickly through the city. Many are already claiming a miracle, saying that Jesus has risen from the dead, but a statement from the High Priest's office categorically denies this and accuses Jesus' followers of stealing the body in order to promote their false claim.

The commander of the Roman garrison has vigorously denied rumours that the soldiers assigned to guard the body either abandoned their posts or were sleeping on duty. He also addressed suggestions that perhaps Jesus was not dead when

placed in the tomb, saying, "We are Romans, we know how to kill people. There is no doubt about it, the man buried in that tomb was dead."

We contacted Joseph of Arimathea, who said he has not been to the tomb since Friday, but was highly excited and said repeatedly, "Jesus is alive!" We have been unable so far to reach Peter for comment, but many of Jesus' followers have been in hiding since Friday.

Jesus himself had spoken on a number of occasions recently about his death, and some say he had predicted that he would rise again.

It is too soon yet to be sure what has actually happened, but we'll keep you up to date with any further news as we receive it, and after the break our Religious Correspondent will be with us to look at some of the Jewish prophecies that some are already saying have been fulfilled by this so-called miracle.

Join us again in a few moments...