

Gospel of Matthew



Suggested responses to questions about Matthew 14:1-36

Note: Be sure to respond to all the questions yourself before reading the suggested responses in order to make the most of this study.

1. Herod thinks that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead because of the miraculous works that Jesus has been performing. The Baptist had accused Herod of breaking the Mosaic law set forth in Leviticus 20:21: “If a man takes his brother’s wife, it is impurity; he has uncovered his brother’s nakedness, they shall be childless.”
2. Matthew 14:3-11 recounts the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was imprisoned for publicly condemning Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife. Although Herod wanted to put the Baptist to death, he hadn’t done so because of John the Baptist’s popularity with the people who considered John to be a prophet. On Herod’s birthday, the daughter of Herodias dances for Herod and his guests, and Herod is so pleased that he swears an oath to give the girl anything she asks. Herodias counsels her daughter, telling her to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Because he’s sworn an oath before his guests, Herod reluctantly complies. Matthew 14:13 gives Jesus’ reaction to the news of John the Baptist’s death: “Now when Jesus heard of this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart.” Mark 6:20 recounts that prior to having the Baptist beheaded, Herod “feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he heard him he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly.” Mark 6:22b-23 explains the extent of the promise Herod made the daughter of Herodias: “‘Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will grant it.’ And he vowed to her, ‘Whatever you ask of me, I will give you, even half my kingdom.’”
3. Matthew recounts the death of John the Baptist to mark the end of the old order of the Old Covenant. Because he’s the last of the Old Testament prophets and the greatest of all men “born of women,” John the Baptist’s martyrdom sets the stage for the beginning of a totally new way of relating to God—the New Covenant instituted by Jesus.
4. A multiplication of loaves and the fishes involving the prophet Elisha and similar to that found in the fourteenth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel is recounted in 2 Kings 4:42-44: “A man came from Baalshalishah bringing the man of God [Elisha] bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And Elisha said, ‘Give to the men, that they may eat.’ But his servant said, ‘How am I to set this before a hundred men?’ So he repeated, ‘Give them to the men, that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, “They shall eat and have some left.’” So he set it before them. And they ate, and he had some left, according to the word of the LORD.” Paragraph 1335 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves, when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist.”

Matthew Lesson 14 Suggested Responses

5. Matthew 14:21 recounts: “And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children,” indicating that more than 5,000 people were fed. Matthew 14:20 describes how when the crowds had eaten their fill, the disciples “took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.” Jesus performs the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes through his chosen 12 disciples, who act in his name and by his power to produce an abundance of food. With the New Covenant, the 12 disciples are going to be sent by Jesus to the lost sheep of the 12 tribes of the house of Israel.
6. The “night vision” in Daniel 7:2 opens with “the four winds of heaven . . . stirring up the great sea,” which is an image of the chaos and tumult of history and the fortunes of the peoples and empires tossed about in the midst of it all. Then Daniel sees a series of four beasts representing four empires, and the fourth beast is the last and worst of all. It’s during the reign of the fourth beast that the “son of man” appears in Daniel’s vision. In Daniel 7:13-14, the prophet writes: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like the son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” Matthew calls attention to the stormy sea and also emphasizes that Jesus performs this miracle of walking on water during the fourth watch of the night (between 3 and 6 a.m.) to remind his readers of the connection between Jesus and Daniel’s night visions and the fourth beast in those visions.
7. The boat is an icon of the Church because just as the boat struggles against the wind and waves in the water, the Church struggles against the waves of history and the persecuting forces of powers and principalities bent on its destruction. The thirteenth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel portrays Jesus teaching from a boat, which is a symbol of the teaching mission of the Church and also of the sacrament of Baptism by which people become members of the body of Christ, the Church.
8. Matthew 14:28-29 recounts how, of all the disciples in the boat, Peter is the one bold enough to say to Jesus: “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water” and then to accept Jesus’ invitation to step out in faith and actually walk on the water. Peter’s standing as the leader of the disciples is shown by the fact that he’s the one disciple who’s quick to act. He gets caught up in the excitement of Jesus walking on the water and steps out onto the water himself—but when he starts to take in the reality of the situation, he begins to sink. In faith, however, Peter is quick to call out to the Lord for help, so he’s also humble enough to admit his need. Peter has enough faith to know that only Jesus can save him from drowning.
9. Paragraph 443 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: “Peter could recognize the transcendent character of the Messiah’s diving sonship because Jesus had clearly allowed it to be so understood. . . . [Jesus] distinguished his sonship from that of his disciples by never saying ‘our Father,’ except to command them: ‘You, then, pray like this: “Our Father,”’ and he emphasized this distinction, saying, ‘my Father and your Father.’”

10. In Matthew 8:20, Jesus says: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” In Matthew 9:6, Jesus says: “But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . ‘Rise, take up your bed and go home.’” In Matthew 10:23, Jesus instructs his disciples: “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.” In Matthew 11:19 Jesus says: “[T]he Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” In Matthew 12:8, Jesus teaches: “For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath.” Then in Matthew 12:32, Jesus cautions: “And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” In Matthew 12:40, Jesus explains the “sign of Jonah”: “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Matthew 13:37 records Jesus’ words: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of man.” Finally, in Matthew 13:41, Jesus prophesies: “The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers.” In these examples from Scripture, Jesus shows that he is man but he is also God. He is in this world but not of this world.

Responses to the Questions for Reflection will vary.

Matthew Notes