



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

## Chapter 14

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# Introduction

In this Chapter We Will Focus on:

- The unlawful marriage of Herod that led to St. John's death
- Two miracles that demonstrate Jesus' power over nature
- The inverse relationship between fear and faith



# An Overview

- Word of Jesus' ministry came to Herod the tetrarch, and St. Matthew tells how Herod killed St. John the Baptist (1-12)
- Hearing of John's death, Jesus sought privacy but was followed by the multitudes and fed over 5000 with five loaves and two fish (13-21)
- Sending His disciples away by boat, Jesus dispersed the crowd and went to the mountain to pray. He later joined His disciples by walking on the sea (22-33)
- In the land of Gennesaret, Jesus healed all who came to Him by simply letting them touch the hem of His garment (34-36)

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- Herod the Great died probably in the first year after the birth of Christ, and left his kingdom to his three sons, of whom this "Herod Antipas" was one
- Technically, a tetrarch ruled a fourth of a region
- Upon his death, Herod the Great's will had divided his kingdom among his remaining sons

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- The Romans honored their faithful ally's final requests by making Herod Antipas the ruler of both the Galilee in the north and Perea on the east side of the Jordan River, the territories where both St. John the Baptist and Jesus located their ministries
- St. Matthew will use the title "king" for Herod Antipas in verse 9 but only in the sense that he was a ruler
- Herod was absent much of the time from Galilee in campaigns against Areta, king of Arabia, he probably did not hear much about Christ until his return home

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- He had been both fearful and fascinated by John the Baptist
- He was afraid St. John the Baptist was returned to avenge his unjust murder
- Herod feared that the putting of John to death might raise a rebellion among the people, which it did not; but he never feared it might stir up his own conscience against him, which it did
- During his life John wrought no miracles (Jn 10:41)
- Herod supposed that his resurrection had clothed him with new power



# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- This arrest of John the Baptist had taken place a year previous, shortly before our Lord's second visit to Galilee (Mt 4:12; Mk 1:14), the events of which are given by John (Jn 4:43-54)
- The prison was the castle of Machaerus
- Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus and Bernice, and grand-daughter of Herod the Great
- Her first marriage was with Herod Philip, her uncle, by whom she had Salome

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- Some time after, she left her husband, and lived publicly with Herod Antipas, her brother-in-law, who had been before married to the daughter of Aretas, king of Arabia Petraea
- As soon as Aretas understood that Herod had determined to put away his daughter, he prepared to make war on him
- The two armies met, and that of Herod was cut to pieces by the Arabians



# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- Josephus says, this was supposed to be a judgment of God on him for the murder of John the Baptist
- The marriage was unlawful because her former husband, Philip, was still living; Antipas former wife was still living; and the Jewish law did not permit a man to marry his niece
- Miserable prince! who fears more to offend his people, than to sin against his God, by shedding innocent blood
- The fear of God corrects us, the fear of man restrains us and the desire of evil remains in the heart

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- In imitation of the Roman emperors, the Herodian princes kept their birthdays with feasting and revelry and magnificent banquets
- We learn from St. Mark that he made a supper, or banquet feast
- It was not customary for the ladies of high rank to dance
- But probably her wicked mother induced her own daughter thus to degrade herself in order to accomplish her revengeful purpose
- Herod confirms his promise by an oath
- It was a common custom to reward a dancer or actor, on a great occasion like this, who pleased, and to ask what they wished
- Herod knew that Salome danced because she had a request to make

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- She went to consult her mother before she made her request (Mk 6:24)
- That vile woman was prepared with an answer
- What a most wicked mother, to give such instructions to her child!
- Indeed, she had manipulated the whole affair so as to secure Herod's consent to the murder of John
- Salome seems to have been gratified by her mother's request
- St. John, by his faithfulness, had offended the whole family, and here was big opportunity for an adulterous mother and her corrupt child to gratify their resentment

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- There probably was real malice to St. John beneath his consent, or else Herod would have found ways to get clear of his promise
- He feels no remorse for his sinful conduct to his brother and his own wife; murder, adultery; and yet he is terrified with the thought of violating a vain and wicked oath on no occasion and in no circumstances obligatory
- Herod did wrong in taking such a rash oath, but he did worse in fulfilling it
- David swore to kill Nabal
- He swore rashly; but with greater piety, he refused to keep his oath

# John the Baptist Beheaded (14:1-12)



- *his disciples came and took away the body and buried it, and went and told Jesus, This was the last office of love to their master, and was done in respect and gratitude to him*
- Their coming to Christ, and informing Him of all this, show, that they were taught by their master to respect Him as the Messiah, and believe in Him, and adhere to Him
- The first Elijah had his Jezebel, who sought his life; the second Elijah had his Jezebel, the not less inhuman Herodias, who obtained his life
- The diversions of the world, feasting and dancing, are but too commonly the occasions of sin



# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- *He departed*, When He heard of the fate of John the Baptist and of Herod's conjectures concerning Himself
- Had He continued in that place, it is probable the hand of this impure female murderer would have been stretched out against Him also
- He did not retire through fear, as some may think. Hence the evangelist does not say, *he fled*, but *he departed*, to show us that he did not fear his enemies. (St. Jerome)



# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- The crowds, anxious to see, converse with Him, or to be healed, pressed on Him so as to give no leisure for reflection, or even to eat (Mk 6:31)
- It was but natural that he should wish a quiet time on receiving the news of the death of St. John
- When he disembarked from the boat, the multitude was waiting

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- “It was great” is shown by the fact that the men numbered 5,000, apart from the women and children
- He seems, from John 6:3, to have retired to the mountain for a short time, but then, filled with compassion, returned to the multitude
- His compassion was partly on account of their bodily infirmities
- And partly on account of the bad situation they were in, the need of spiritual pastors

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- Hebrews counted two evenings: the first began when the sun was declining, about three in the afternoon; and such was the evening here mentioned
- The second evening was after sunset, or the night-time, Matthew 14:23
- Christ does not always anticipate the intentions of His supplicants: on this occasion, He waited for the multitude to ask of Him to feed them; but they, though their great respect for Him, did not dare to request the favor. (St. Chrysostom)

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- The preaching of Christ must have been accompanied with uncommon power to these people's souls, to have induced them to leave their homes to follow him from village to village, for they could never hear enough
- To neglect to make use of any means for the support of their lives, so that they might still have the privilege of hearing him
- When a soul is either well replenished with the bread of life the necessities of the body are, for the time, little regarded

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- The presence of Christ and His gospel, makes a desert not only tolerable, but desirable
- *Deserted place*, There are no farm houses in Palestine
- The whole population lives in towns or villages, and often the farmers go many miles to their fields
- He that seeks first the kingdom of heaven is sure to have every temporal requisite

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- We learn from the parallel accounts that the disciples did not understand how this could be done, though they cheerfully obeyed
- They need not depart; meaning so long as He was with them, who had power enough to provide a sufficient meal for them, as well as by a word speaking, to heal their diseases; however, to try their faith, and make way for the working of the following miracle, He says to them *You give them something to eat*



# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- It was Andrew who spoke (Jn 6:8,9)
- The loaves here were of barley meal made into small, thin cakes, baked hard on the side of the oven
- The best way to have an increase of temporal supplies, is to bring what we have, and put it into Christ's hands
- Let the servants of the Gospel attend also to this

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- let him bring all his gifts and graces to his Maker
- let him ever know that his word can be of no use, unless the blessing of Christ be in it
- We learn from St. Mark that they sat down in companies Mark 6:39
- He gave thanks and asked the Father's blessing on the food

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- This little supply of bread was increased by Christ's creating power, till the whole multitude were satisfied
- Let us learn to avoid all waste
- He gives that bread to His disciples and bids them to distribute it to the multitude
- Such is its blessed and divine nature that the more they distribute to hungry, famishing souls, the more they have remaining for themselves

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- In the Old Testament there are three feeding miracles:
  1. The feeding miracles associated with Moses in the Exodus journey to the Promised Land in the unending supply of manna and the two times it rained quail
  2. The prophet Elijah caused the widow of Zarephath's nearly empty jar of meal and her depleted supply of oil to provide food throughout an extended famine
  3. The prophet Elisha multiplied twenty loaves of barley bread to feed one hundred men

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- St. Matthew's telling of the miracle of feeding the more than five thousand is not only meant to remind us of God's compassion in the Old Testament but to also prepare us for a greater miracle that St. John's Gospel points us to in Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse that took place the day after the miracle feeding
- In that discourse the Jews saw Jesus feeding miracle the day before in the context of the miracle of the manna and Jesus as the new prophet Moses come to liberate His people and the new David come to reestablish the kingdom of Israel (see Jn 6:14-15; 30-31)

# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- In that discourse Jesus promises that He will one day give His Body and Blood as food and drink for the salvation of man (Jn 6:22-65)
- His miracle feeding and the discourse the next day is a foreshadowing of the giving of Himself in the Eucharist
- The number five is the number of grace and any multiple of a number signifies abundance of the symbolic nature of the number; in this case, the number signifies the abundance of God's grace in meeting the needs of His people



# Feeding the Five Thousand (14:13-21)



- The five loaves and two fishes of the meal also may have symbolic significance
- Together they add up to the number seven; it is also one of the "perfect" numbers (3, 7, 10 and 12), signifying perfection, fullness and completion, especially spiritual perfection

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- They were reluctant to go without their Master
- We here see the fervent love of the disciples for their Lord, they were unwilling to be separated from Him even for a moment
- Yet He wished to be alone
- He had come to the desert place for retreat; the multitude followed, and sought after the miracle to proclaim Him King

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- His disciples probably sympathized
- Hence He sent them, too, away, and stayed to pray and reflect alone
- By our Savior's conduct, we are taught to leave occasionally the society of men, and to withdraw into solitude, as a more proper place to converse with heaven in earnest and fervent prayer

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- About twenty-five or thirty furlongs, or three and a half miles from the shore (Jn 6:19), about the middle of the sea
- The wind came rushing down from the mountains, and in attempting to make land at Bethsaida, where the Lord had directed, it was in their faces
- Sudden gusts are common on the Sea of Galilee

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- The Jews anciently divided the night into three parts of four hours each, usually called watches Lamentations 2:19, Judges 7:19, Exodus 14:24
- In the time of our Savior they divided the night into four watches, the fourth having been introduced by the Romans
- The Lord saw their trouble from his mountain-top, and through the darkness of the night, for His heart was all with them; yet would He not go to their relief till His own time came
- They were afraid

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- The sight was remarkable
- It was sufficient to awe them
- In the dark night, among the turbulent clouds appeared the form of a man
- They thought it was a spirit an apparition
- It was a common belief among the ancients that the spirits of people after death frequently appeared to the living



# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- Nothing but this voice of Christ could, in such circumstances, have given courage and comfort to His disciples
- How often has He to speak this word of encouragement, even to His own! almost always when they are brought suddenly, or in an unusual way, face to face with him Genesis 15:1; 21:17, Judges 6:23, Matthew 28:5, Luke 2:10
- The same language used by Jesus in Jerusalem (Jn 8:58), for which the Pharisees would have stoned Him, and in the Old Testament to designate Jehovah (Ex 3:14)

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- Christ says not merely, It is I, your Friend and Master; He says, it is the I AM, who is coming to you, the Almighty One who rules wind and waves, who made them, and whom they obey
- Here is an instance of the characteristic enthusiasm and rashness of St. Peter
- He had less real faith than he supposed, and more eagerness than his faith would justify
- He was really attached to Jesus, but still easily overcome and prone to fall

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- However impossible the thing commanded by Christ may appear, it is certain He will give power to accomplish it to those who receive His word by faith; but we must take care never to put Christ's power to the proof for the gratification of a vain curiosity; or even for the strengthening of our faith, when the ordinary means for doing that are within our reach
- It was by faith in the power of Christ he was upheld

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- When that faith failed, by which the laws of gravitation were suspended, no wonder that those laws returned to their normal action, and that he began to sink
- It was not the violence of the winds, nor the raging of the waves, which endangered his life, but his littleness of faith
- At first St. Peter was successful, but then when he took his eyes off Jesus to look at the stormy sea he became frightened and began to sink into the churning water
- St. Peter's act did not exemplify his faith, but his doubts

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- True faith never attempts wonders merely for the sake of doing them
- It is a fact that ought to be noted that the Gospels narrate the failures in miraculous power on the part of the apostles as well as their success
- No book of myths would do this
- At the same time it is always made plain why they failed

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- St. Peter had two choices: he could try to swim back to the boat or he could call upon Jesus to save him
- Evidence of St. Peter's faith in Jesus and his confidence in what he knew was Jesus' true identity is found in the fact that St. Peter cried out to Jesus to save him
- St. John Chrysostom and St. Augustine identify Peter's crying out to Jesus as an act of repentance



# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- Jesus does not so much give St. Peter a rebuke as a teaching moment
- They were safe, for the Lord was with them
- Under His arms there is always safety
- Five miracles are here formed:
  1. Christ walks upon the water
  2. enables Peter to do the same
  3. when Peter begins to sink, preserves him
  4. suddenly stills the tempest
  5. the ship is immediately in port

# Jesus Walks on the Sea (14:22-33)



- In Jesus' identification of Himself as the "I AM" and in His power over nature, the disciples have understood that Jesus bears the title "Son of God" in a sense not previously applied to other men and having God for a Father in a way others had not previously enjoyed

# Many Touch Him and Are Made Well (14:34-36)



- The land of Gennesare is A small district four miles long and two or three wide, on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, to which it gave one of its names
- They had already seen His miracles; and now they collect all the diseased people they can find, that He may have the same opportunity of showing forth His marvelous power, and they of being the instruments of relieving their friends and neighbors
- They came humbly beseeching Him to help them

# Many Touch Him and Are Made Well (14:34-36)



- Wherever Christ went, He was doing good
- The experiences of others may direct and encourage us in seeking for Christ
- As many as touched, were made perfectly whole
- Those whom Christ heals, He heals perfectly



# Conclusion

- Who did Herod think Jesus was when he heard about Him?
- What led to Herod's arrest of John the Baptist?
- As Jesus walked on the sea, what led to Peter sinking?
- What is the biblical reason John the Baptist cites for condemning the desire of Herod Antipas for Herodias?



# Conclusion

- How does the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew's Gospel reflect eucharistic language? What Old Testament event is similar?
- How does their function of distributing the loaves and fishes point to the disciples' priesthood?
- Compare the banquet Jesus' hosted for the "lost sheep" of the faithful to Herod Antipas' banquet of the rich and decadent who have failed to shepherd God's people.





# Conclusion

## For Application:

- When did God ask you to do something you had no resources for? How did you know He was asking that? How did you respond? What was the result?
- When have you asked God to let you do something you had no resources for? What was the result? How might Jesus' question to Peter apply to you?