



# St. Matthew's Cathedral eNews

## Christ + Compassion + Community

*From the Dean*

### **The Significance of the Ascension: Where's Jesus?**

The Feast of the Ascension is scheduled on the Church Calendar for Thursday, May 14, forty days after the resurrection of Jesus. At St. Matthew's Cathedral we are transferring its celebration from Thursday to Sunday. It's one of those things that is really significant to our doctrine, but, quite frankly, not many Christians really grasp why it is so important.

Luke, the writer of both the Gospel of Luke and Acts, records in Acts, chapter 1 that after giving the disciples their final charge, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel"—Jesus ascended to heaven. Luke-Acts, scholars believe, was originally one complete book (or Gospel) that was divided into two by the early Church. If that is true, then that makes the Ascension of Jesus the hinge point of Luke's larger work.

The early Church recognized its importance. Reference to the Ascension is included in all three of the major creeds. The Apostles' Creed states that "On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven . . ."

So, the short answer to the question of "Where's Jesus?" is, "He's in heaven."

However, there's more to the answer than that. Much of the popular notions of heaven get in the way of answering this question well.

The really important question is not "*Where* is heaven?" The important question is, "*What* is heaven?" Heaven is the nearer or immediate presence of God. When the scripture tells us that "a cloud took him out of sight" (Acts 1:9), we need to remember that in scripture often a cloud represents the *shekinah*, the glory of God.

We often think of heaven in *spatial* terms; instead, we need to think of heaven in *relational* terms. Remember, we're dealing with God and eternity, light, quarks, and butterfly effects, and so on. Our newer understandings of physics help us to see that the reality of the Ascension is not something that we must deposit into an "it's all by faith" category. New understandings in physics helps us to see that the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus open us up to this relational understanding of the presence of God that is both *spatial* and *relational*.

Thus, Jesus is both absent and present with us: in heaven with the Father and with us with the Father. We regularly pray, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." With a deeper understanding of the Ascension, we get more of a hint of what we are praying. (Thanks to Rich Vincent for helping me on this.)