

The Night Sky

Saturn Returns to Evening Sky

Comet Pan-STARRS did not get as bright as many had hoped, though some did catch a glimpse of it near the crescent moon on March 12th. This comet continues to fade as it moves northward along the western horizon 45 minutes after sunset. From this point forward, you will need binoculars to spot this comet in the northwest sky an hour after sunset. Note that from April 2nd through the 6th, this comet will appear right next to the great Andromeda galaxy (M31) and will have a similar surface brightness as the galaxy.

As the month of April progresses, bright Jupiter sinks lower in the western evening sky. However Saturn will return to the evening sky as it reaches opposition on April 28th. On this day, Saturn will be on the opposite side of the sky from the sun and hence will rise at sunset on that day. Saturn can be spotted about 15 degrees east of the star Spica, the brightest star in the constellation of Virgo. Saturn's rings are tilted by 18 degrees now which will make for a beautiful sight through a telescope. All of the other planets are still too close to the sun to be seen, however the bright planet Venus will return to the evening sky near the end of April.

The full moon in March occurred on Wednesday, March 27th. The date of Easter this year occurs on March 31st. The Easter celebration was set by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. to occur on the first Sunday after the first full moon that occurs after the vernal equinox, the first day of spring. Meanwhile, the full moon in April occurs on the 25th where it will appear just below Saturn making this planet an easy "find" on that date. Native Americans had a variety of names associated with the full moon of April, all associated with the spring season. These names include the Full Pink Moon, the Full Sprouting Grass Moon, the Egg Moon, and the Full Fish Moon.

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