



# WESTMINSTER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY, INC. (WASI)



## WASI Update



WASI Update—April 2026

Contact the Secretary at [secretary@westminsterastro.org](mailto:secretary@westminsterastro.org)

Our **membership meeting** will be **April 8** at Bear Branch Nature Center. Join us at 7:00 for Jeffrey Jacobs' talk about useful astronomy apps.

Then, at 7:30 our **guest speaker** is Dr. Peter Plavchan who will discuss "The NASA Landolt mission". The NASA Landolt mission is a timely PIONEERS program that will provide significant improvement in the accuracy of photometric measurements of absolute stellar fluxes. This will be accomplished with a high accuracy calibrated suite of laser beacons which will be observable from selected ground-based observatory stations. Landolt will improve the photometric accuracy to <0.5% at visible and near-infrared wavelengths for >60 target stars, improving upon the half-century old techniques. The Landolt mission will allow us to re-calibrate the brightnesses of millions of stars. Such measurements can only be achieved by a space-based orbiting artificial star, where the physical photon flux is accurately known. Accuracy of absolute flux zero points is now the leading error budget term in the characterization of stars, be they standard stars or exoplanet hosts. Similarly, the accuracy of the ratio of the VIS/NIR absolute flux calibration zero point is the limiting error budget term in the Supernovae (SNe) Ia cosmological constraints on dark energy, a key science goal of the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope (Roman) and Vera C. Rubin Observatory (Rubin). Consequently, Landolt will enable the refinement of dark energy parameters, improve our ability to assess the habitability of terrestrial worlds, and advance fundamental constraints on stellar evolution.

**April 11** is our monthly planetarium show and **star party** at Bear Branch Nature Center. And the **member-only star party** there is **April 17-19**. The new moon is the 17th.

Want to be able to **run the planetarium**? It's fun and a big help. May's membership meeting will have a training session by Al Anson.

We're looking for a volunteer to demo the use of our **Lunt solar scope** at the July meeting. Please let the secretary ([secretary@westminsterastro.org](mailto:secretary@westminsterastro.org)) know if you're interested.

And we're looking for volunteers to present at the August through December membership meetings about, well, anything of astronomy interest. Maybe meteor showers, demos of your equipment, etc. The sky is the limit (so to speak). Email Laurie to volunteer: [treasurer@westminsterastro.org](mailto:treasurer@westminsterastro.org).

Did you have to take a required minimum distribution on investment accounts, or did your tax return have a nice surprise in terms of a refund? WASI is a 501 (c)(3) organization, so any gift is tax deductible. Contact [treasurer@westminsterastro.org](mailto:treasurer@westminsterastro.org) for more information.

# Outreach Events

WASI holds many events to introduce the public to the wonders of the night sky. We're always looking for members to help out with these. It's fun and who knows... you might encourage a youngster to become the next Carl Sagan. Questions? Email [president@westminsterastro.org](mailto:president@westminsterastro.org).

Here's this month's calendar. If you go to the calendar web page (<https://nightsky.ipl.nasa.gov/events/wasi/>) and click on an event it will give more details.

<span>&lt;</span> <b>April 2026</b> <span>&gt;</span>						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29 <a href="#">07:31 PM Sunset</a>	30	31	01	02	03	04
05 <a href="#">07:37 PM Sunset</a>	06	07	08 <a href="#">07:00 PM Meeting - open to public</a>	09	10	11 <a href="#">07:00 PM Star Party &amp; Planetarium</a>
12 <a href="#">07:45 PM Sunset</a>	13	14	15	16	17 <a href="#">Members' Observing</a>	18 <a href="#">Members' Observing</a> <a href="#">08:30 PM SD Star Party</a>
19 <a href="#">Members' Observing</a> <a href="#">07:52 PM Sunset</a>	20	21	22	23	24	25 <a href="#">06:00 PM Milkhouse Star Party</a> <a href="#">08:00 PM Catocin Creek Star Party</a>
26 <a href="#">11:59 AM ROCKVILLE SCIENCE DAY</a> <a href="#">07:58 PM Sunset</a>	27	28	29	30	01	02

# What's Up Basics; April 2026 – by Laurie V. Ansorge

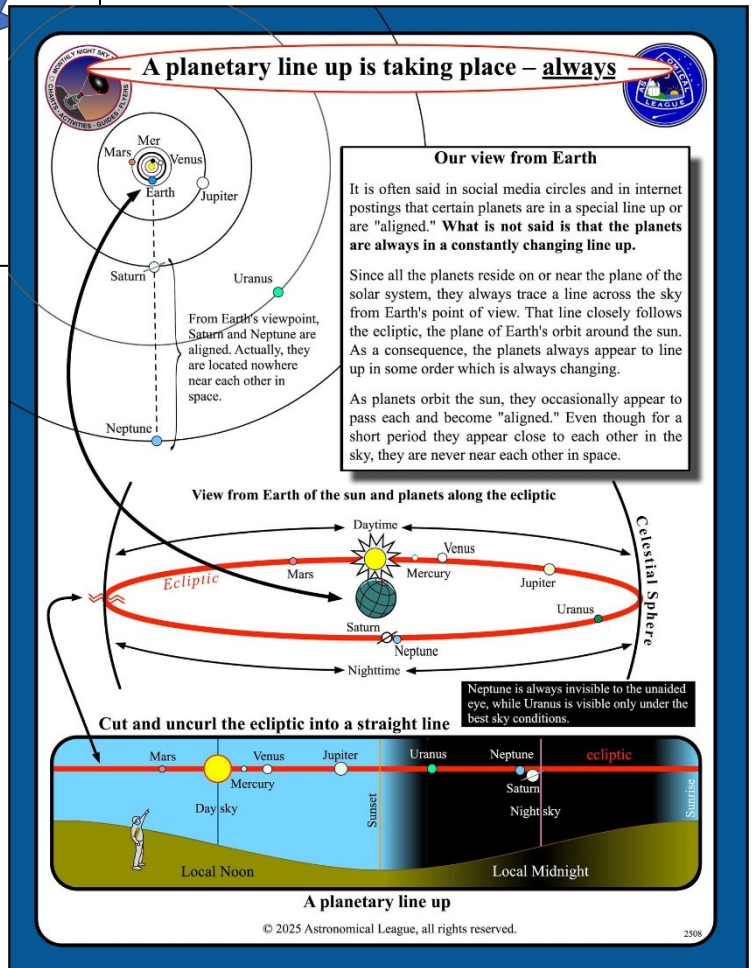
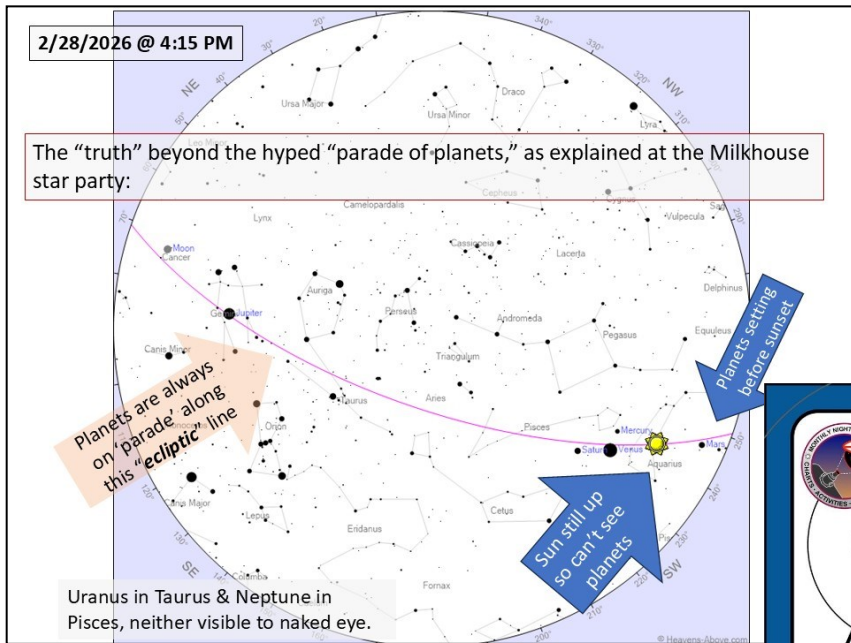
Did you see all the media hype last month about the planetary line up? We had a lot of questions at the Milkhouse star party and here's some of the information we explained to folks.

To the left is a diagram of the planetary situation just before the Milkhouse star party. The time was chosen to show Mars before it set since for the duration of the star party that means it can't be seen. Mars, Mercury and Venus were all too close to the sun to be seen with the naked eye as well.

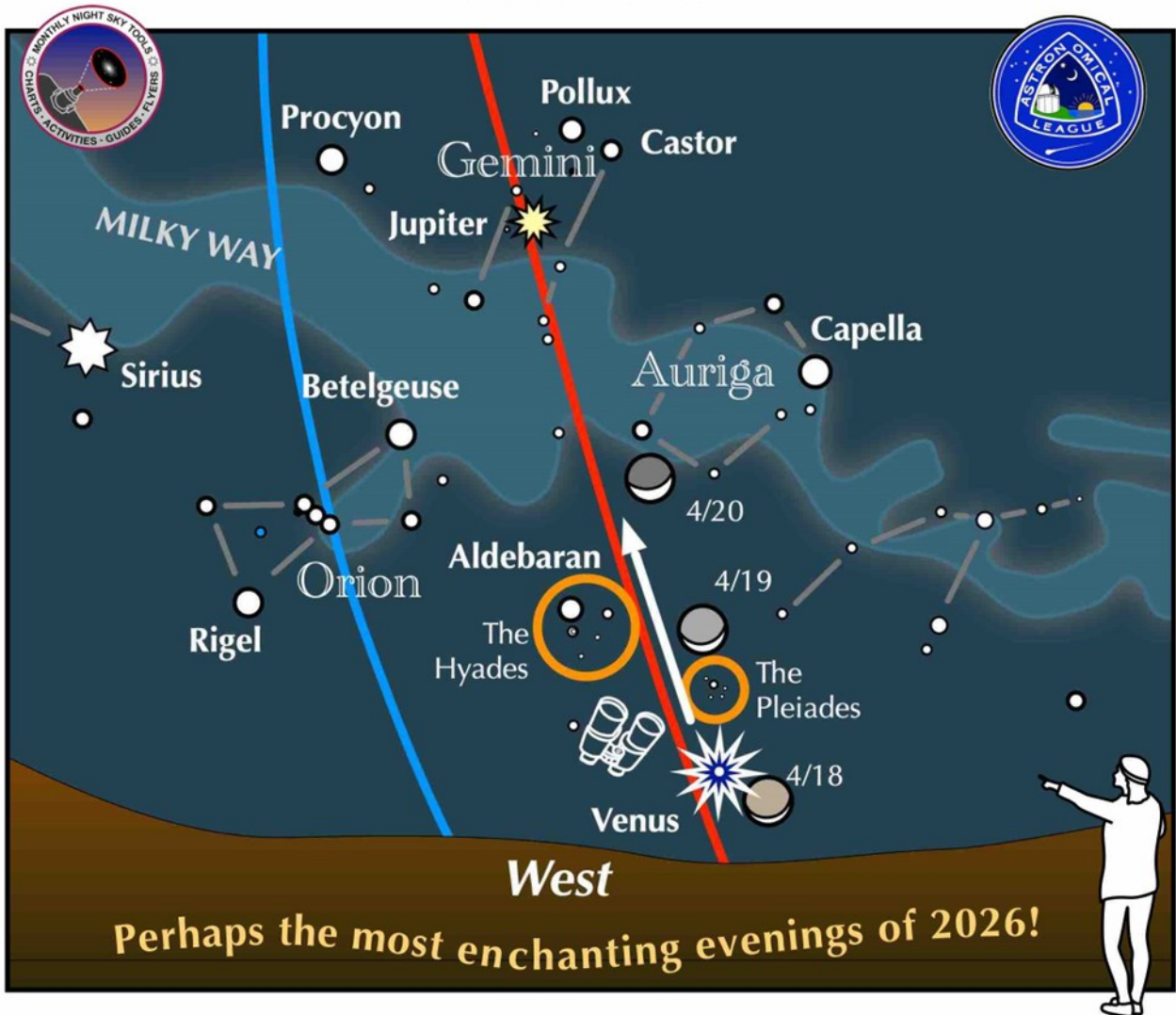
We were able to observe Saturn although through a lot of atmosphere. Jupiter was dazzlingly bright ahead of the moon in Gemini, rivaling Sirius for attention.

From the Astronomical League we have this drawing (by John Goss, former president). It explains why the planets are always lined up. The simple answer is that we are (including Earth) all on the solar plane or ecliptic, orbiting the sun.

There's a very cool interactive orrery of our solar system where you can try this out for yourself, found at this link: <https://eyes.nasa.gov/apps/orrery/#/home>.



## If you can see only one celestial event this April, see this one.



**Enhance the scene –  
use binoculars!**

[www.astroleague.org](http://www.astroleague.org)

On April 18, 19, & 20, look low in the west-northwest 60 minutes after sunset.

- On the first evening, the crescent moon, glowing full with earthshine, floats near brilliant Venus, while on the second evening, it moves just above the delicate Pleiades star cluster, and to the right of the bright star Aldebaran and the intriguing Hyades star cluster.
- On the third evening, the slightly thicker, but more pronounced crescent moon hangs above the Pleiades and the Hyades.
- Above it all, bright Jupiter plows through Gemini, shining near Castor and Pollux.



The 2026 Astronomical League Convention

# ALCON 2026

C I N C I N N A T I


Join us August 12th -15th 2026 as  
ALCON returns to the Great Lakes Region  
for the first time in 27 years.

For more information visit  
**ALCON2026.org**

ALCON 2026 is being hosted by the Cincinnati Astronomical Society, one of the nation's oldest and largest amateur societies.

A wide variety of events are being planned, along with the annual Star-b-que, and many other fun and engaging activities.

The ALCON will be held in Covington Kentucky at the Marriott Rivercenter; a hotel that looks out across the Ohio river into downtown Cincinnati. Come visit for the entire week and join us for ALCON 2026!

Coming up: **ALCON 2026** in Cincinnati.

It's been a while since an ALCON (Astronomical League Convention) was this close to home.  
<https://www.alcon2026.org/> Dates: August 12-15, 2026.

Registration is open! From the December edition of the League's Reflector magazine:

April's "**Basics**" (Membership meeting 4/8, 7-7:30 pm): Jeffrey Jacobs will be reviewing some astronomy apps.

- **May:** Planetarium Training/Run Through; Al Ansorge (in planetarium)
- **June:** Jeff Kretsch presents in the planetarium on UFO locales
- **July:** Seeking volunteer for demo on club Lunt solar scope at the observatory
- **August – December:** Have a topic to present? We want you! Email Laurie to volunteer: [Treasurer@Westminsterastro.org](mailto:Treasurer@Westminsterastro.org). Possible topics: meteor showers, demo of your equipment, your favorite object...

### New Astronomical League Challenge #16 - on the Mystery around M102

- Find it on the webpage: <https://www.astroleague.org/al-observing-challenge-special-observing-award/>
- <https://www.astroleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/M102-Messiers-Unknown-Journey.pdf>
- Observations are done in JUNE with a July deadline. This will be fun as it includes observing, star chart sleuthing, some historical literature review, and an outreach presentation.
- And Matt Orsie shares this information: <http://www.messier.seds.org/m/m102d.html>

And we're all waiting for the TCrB nova to complete Challenge #10!