



WESTMINSTER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY, INC. (WASI)



WASI Update



WASI Update—March 2026

Contact the Secretary at secretary@westminsterastro.org

Our **membership meeting** will be **March 11** at Bear Branch Nature Center. Join us at 7:00 for Curt Roelle's talk about Ron Smith's method of conducting a **Messier Marathon**. This is a good time of year for trying to snag these 110 objects. Charles Messier was a comet hunter who composed (most of) this list of objects to *avoid* when hunting comets. Ironically, these are now considered some of the best things to observe in the night sky. The list comprises objects from M1—the Crab Nebula, a remnant of a supernova that exploded in the year 1054, lighting up the daytime sky, to M110, a satellite galaxy of Andromeda (which is M31).

Then, at 7:30 our **guest speaker** is Fr. Richard D'Souza, who is the Superior of the Jesuit community attached to the Vatican Observatory. The topic of this talk will be on **galactic archaeology**. Fr. D'Souza will demonstrate how we can infer the past histories of nearby galaxies like the Milky Way to understand how their past mergers influenced the shape of galaxies. The outskirts of these galaxies contain vital information of the past merger history of the galaxy and is made up of the stars of destroyed galaxies. With the aid of models constructed from large computer simulations, we can infer the most massive galaxy that has merged into the main galaxy. Finally, he will demonstrate how this can be applied to our closest neighbour - the Andromeda galaxy. We can infer that the Andromeda galaxy merged with a galaxy half the size of the Milky Way nearly 2-3 Billion years ago, and the stellar disk of Andromeda survived this crash.

March 14 is our monthly planetarium show and **star party** at Bear Branch Nature Center. And March's **member-only star party** there is **March 13-15**. The new moon is the 19th.

Highlight of the month: A **total lunar eclipse** early on **March 3**. See page 3 for more info.

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 Ansoerge.

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

And we're looking for volunteers to present at the July 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.

March is **Women's History Month**. We're hosting an event on women in astronomy on Sunday, **March 8**, 6 p.m. at St. James, Mt. Airy; [1307 N. Main St., Mt. Airy, NC 27030](https://www.google.com/maps/place/1307+N+Main+St,+Mt+Airy,+NC+27030), followed by a star party. We are welcome to stay as late as we like should we find the conditions favorable. <https://nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov/club/wasi/events/118442/>

Outreach Events

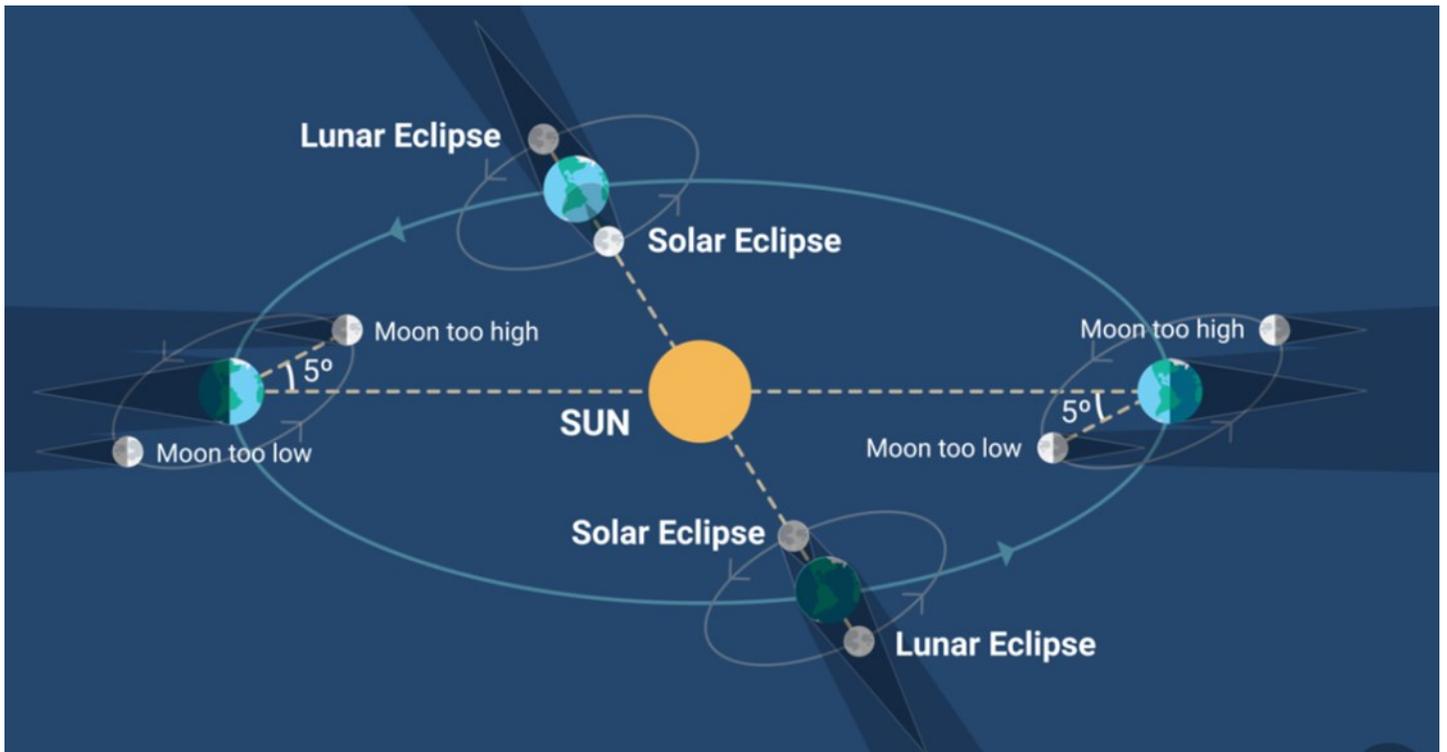
WASI holds many events to introduce the public to the wonders of the night sky. We're always looking for members to help out with these. It's fun and who knows... you might encourage a youngster to become the next Carl Sagan. Questions? Email president@westminsterastro.org.

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.

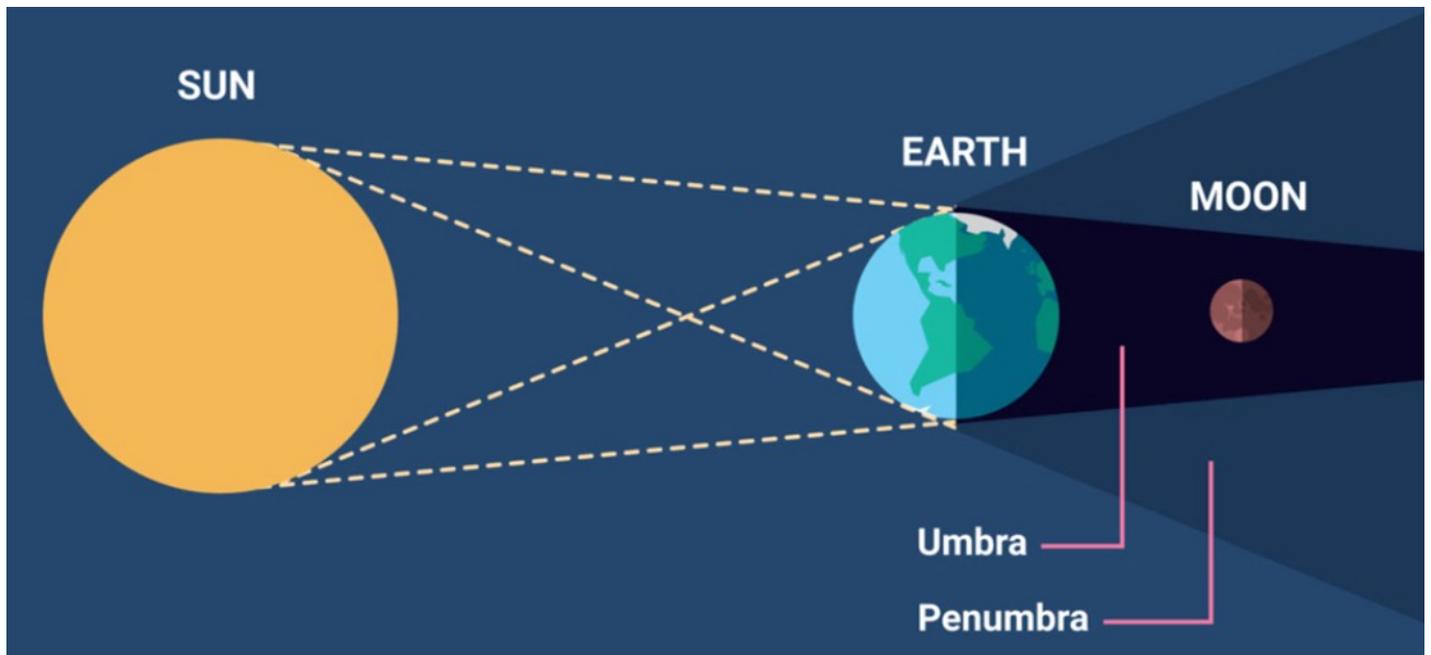
< March 2026 >						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
01 06:02 PM Sunset	02	03	04	05	06	07
08 06:00 PM Women's History 06:09 PM Sunset	09	10	11 07:00 PM Meeting - open to public	12	13 Members' Observing	14 07:00 PM Star Party & Planetarium Members' Observing
15 Members' Observing 07:17 PM Sunset	16	17	18	19	20	21 06:30 PM SD Star Party
22 07:24 PM Sunset	23	24	25	26	27	28 05:00 PM Milkhouse Star Party
29 07:31 PM Sunset	30	31	01	02	03	04

What's Up Basics

March 2026 – by Laurie V. Ansorge



We're in the biannual eclipse season and there's a lunar eclipse this month. The graphic below explains the phenomenon of eclipse seasons. For the positions of the Earth/Moon system around the sun in the picture, think of this as the spring/fall seasons of the orbit around the sun, where the timing is somewhat near the equinoxes.



The animation shows what the eclipse approximately looks like in Baltimore. Stages and times of the eclipse are outlined below. All times are local time (EST) for Baltimore.

Time	Phase	Event	Direction	Altitude
3:44 am Tue, Mar 3		Penumbral Eclipse begins <i>The Earth's penumbra start touching the Moon's face.</i>	← 250°	↗ 32.0°
4:50 am Tue, Mar 3		Partial Eclipse begins <i>Partial moon eclipse starts - moon is getting red.</i>	← 261°	↗ 19.8°
6:04 am Tue, Mar 3		Total Eclipse begins <i>Total moon eclipse starts - completely red moon. Moon close to horizon, so make sure you have free sight to West.</i>	← 273°	↗ 5.7°
Maximum Eclipse				
6:33 am Tue, Mar 3		<i>Moon is closest to the center of the shadow. Since the Moon is near the horizon at this time, we recommend going to a high point or finding an unobstructed area with free sight to West for the best view of the eclipse. Additionally, the eclipsed moon combined with dimming near horizon might make the Moon very hard or impossible to see.</i>	← 277°	↗ 0.5°
6:38 am Tue, Mar 3	Setting	Moonset <i>Setting, but the combination of a very low moon and the total eclipse phase makes the Moon so dim before it sets, that it might disappear from view some time before it sets.</i>	← 278°	↗ -0.2°
7:02 am Tue, Mar 3	Not directly visible	Total Eclipse ends <i>Below horizon</i>	← 281°	↗ -5.5°
8:17 am Tue, Mar 3	Not directly visible	Partial Eclipse ends <i>Below horizon</i>	↖ 293°	↖ -18.9°
9:23 am Tue, Mar 3	Not directly visible	Penumbral Eclipse ends <i>Below horizon</i>	↖ 306°	↖ -29.7°

Notice the altitude for the time of the eclipse as the moon sets just as the eclipse is getting underway.

The last time we were able to view a full lunar eclipse from Bear Branch Nature Center was March 25, 2025, and yes, the clouds held off until after the umbral shadow had passed.

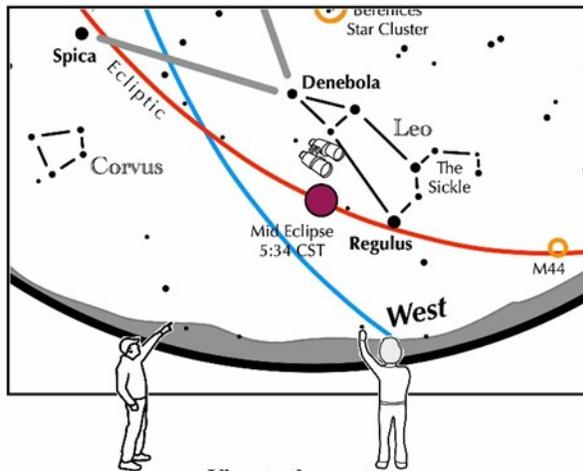
Here are some useful sites:

<https://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/eclipse-season.html>

<https://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/total-lunar-eclipse.html>

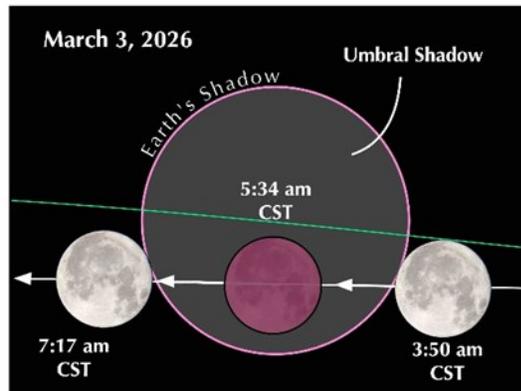
<https://www.timeanddate.com/eclipse/in/usa/baltimore?iso=20260303>

If you can observe only one celestial event in the morning this March, see this one.



View to the west on March 3 at 5 am CST

Eclipse times
 Partial eclipse begins: 3:50 a.m. CST
 Total eclipse begins: 5:04
 Mid eclipse: 5:34
 Total eclipse ends: 6:03
 Partial eclipse ends: 7:17



The Moon slides through a total eclipse

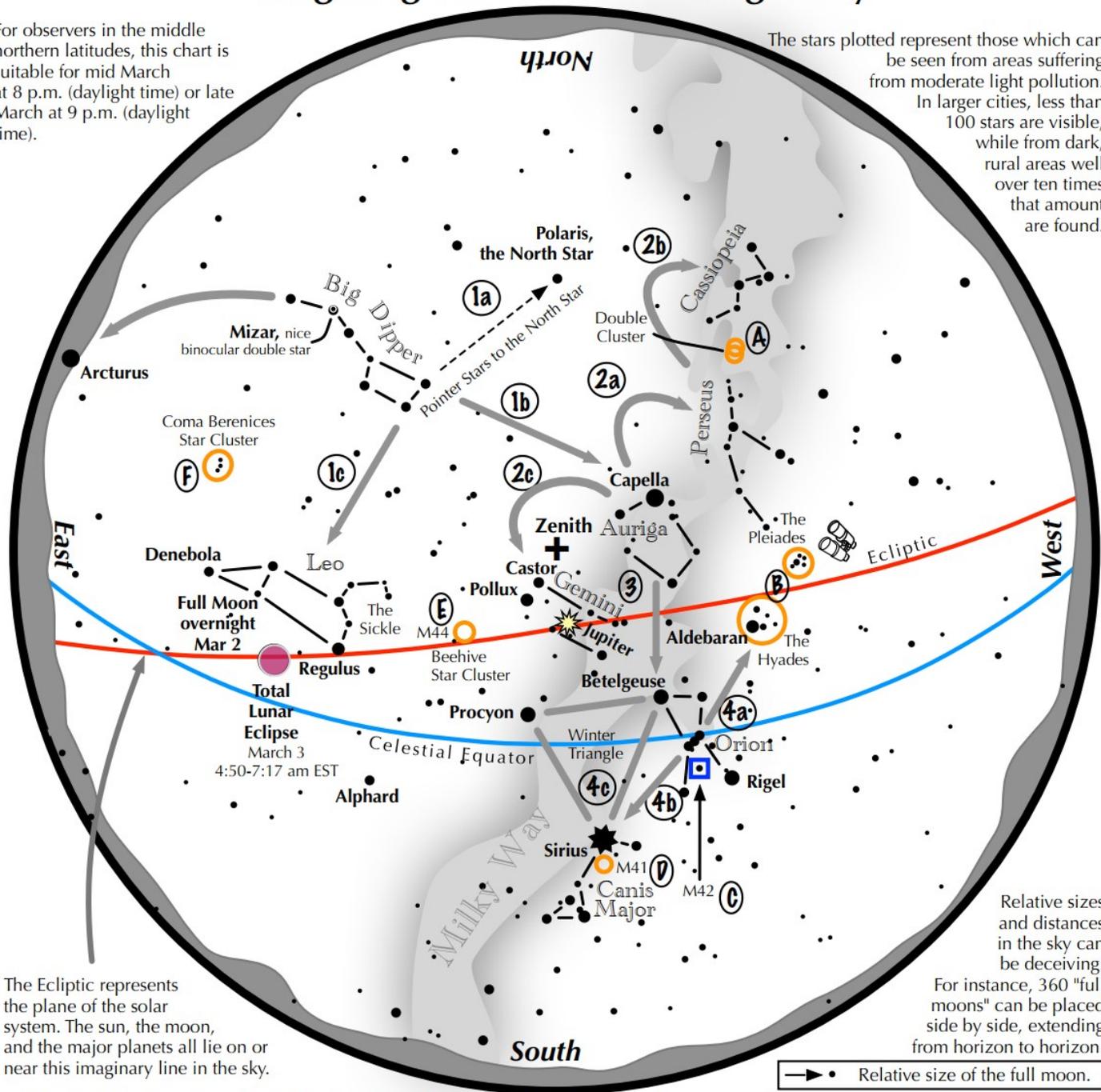
In the hours before dawn on March 3, the brilliant full moon slides into Earth's shadow.

- Even though the partial umbral eclipse begins at 3:50 a.m. CDT, darkening might not be noticed for another 5 minutes.
- When totality is reached, the full moon's brilliance is gone, allowing the stars to appear. Can you see that the moon lies east of Regulus and below Leo?
- At mid eclipse, what color is the moon? How red is it?
- During the partial phases, can you notice that the shadow's edge is not straight, but curved?

Navigating the mid March Night Sky

For observers in the middle northern latitudes, this chart is suitable for mid March at 8 p.m. (daylight time) or late March at 9 p.m. (daylight time).

The stars plotted represent those which can be seen from areas suffering from moderate light pollution. In larger cities, less than 100 stars are visible, while from dark, rural areas well over ten times that amount are found.



The Ecliptic represents the plane of the solar system. The sun, the moon, and the major planets all lie on or near this imaginary line in the sky.

Relative sizes and distances in the sky can be deceiving. For instance, 360 "full moons" can be placed side by side, extending from horizon to horizon.

—•— Relative size of the full moon.

Navigating the March night sky: Simply start with what you know or with what you can easily find.

- 1 Above the northeast horizon rises the Big Dipper. Draw a line from its two end bowl stars upwards to the North Star. Its top bowl stars point west to Capella in Auriga, nearly overhead. Leo reclines below the Dipper's bowl.
- 2 From Capella jump northwestward along the Milky Way to Perseus, then to the "W" of Cassiopeia. Next jump southeastward from Capella to the twin stars of Castor and Pollux in Gemini.
- 3 Directly south of Capella stands the constellation of Orion with its three Belt Stars, its bright red star Betelgeuse, and its bright blue-white star Rigel.
- 4 Use Orion's three Belt stars to point northwest to the red star Aldebaran and the Hyades star cluster, then to the Pleiades star cluster. Travel southeast from the Belt stars to the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius. It is a member of the Winter Triangle.

Binocular Highlights

A: Between the "W" of Cassiopeia and Perseus lies the Double Cluster. B: Examine the stars of the Pleiades and Hyades, two naked eye star clusters. C: M42 in Orion is a star forming nebula. D: Look south of Sirius for the star cluster M41. E: M44, a star cluster barely visible to the naked eye, lies to the southeast of Pollux. F: Look high in the east for the loose star cluster of Coma Berenices.



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**. As of this writing, registration isn't open yet but the link allows for signing up for receiving notice when the site is up and running

The 2026 Astronomical League Convention

ALCON 2026

CINCINNATI

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](https://www.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!



On the lighter (ahem) side: From the Monroeville Breeze, Indiana, on September 20, 1934:

Dear Mr. Wynn:

Can you tell me which is most useful to us—the “moon” or the “sun.”

Yours truly,

S. TRONEMER.

Answer: The moon is, because it gives more light at night when it is so dark; the sun shines only in the daytime, when we don't need it.