

Anticipation of something great

By Vernon Whetstone

Amateur Astronomer

It has been said that the greater the anticipation of an event, the greater is the importance to the one anticipating. I would think this saying could be applied to several things; Christmas, birthdays, anniversaries, reunions and such like.

I don't know about other astronomers, but this one is in a state of great anticipation. During the first two weeks in March there will be two planetary conjunctions and the moon will be playing hide-and-seek with those four planets during the last few days of February.

Tonight, Wednesday, Feb. 22, is the first.

Look east about a half hour after sunset for a one-day old moon which will be just to the right of tiny, innermost planet, Mercury.

The moon will be barely past one day old so it will be a very, very slender crescent. Binoculars will be essential to catch this event. The pair should fit inside the binocular field of view. They will be just slightly above the horizon, so make sure your view in that direction is flat, and clear.

On Thursday night, again about a half-hour after sunset, find the moon again, this time lounging below and right of our old friend Uranus. The pair will be about six degrees apart—just slightly wider than the field of view.

The next night the moon will be slightly higher, about eight degrees, and a bit to the right of Uranus.

On Friday, Feb. 25, the moon will move on to its next planetary meeting, this time with bright Venus. The pair will be spectacular in binoculars. You may even have the opportunity to glimpse some "earthshine" on the lunar face.

Earthshine is the light from the Sun, reflected off of Earth's surface onto the moon. It will make the face of the moon dimly lit and barely visible. It is more prominent if you wait for a darker sky.

Following the moon on its journey we next meet with the largest planet of them all, Jupiter, the King of the Planets on Sunday evening, Feb. 26. The pair will be visible in the same binocular field of view.

Not to be left out, the other two visible planets, Mars and Saturn, will receive a lunar visit on March 6 and 7 and March 10 respectively.

The double planetary conjunctions will take place during the first half of March. Mark your calendars for March 2-8 when Mercury will visit Uranus and March 12-14 when the two brightest planets in the sky, Venus and Jupiter will meet.

We have been watching that pair for the last few weeks as they have been moving ever so slowly toward each other, and now for the grand payoff.

More about the conjunctions as the dates draw closer.

SKY WATCH: New moon yesterday, Feb. 21. Watch the moon this week and next as it visits all the pretty little planets in a row. Next week we add a leap day to February. Which means all the

people born on Feb. 29, can now celebrate their birthday, an event they can do only once every four years.

NEXT WEEK: More astronomical blathering.