

Astronomy in the Two Dales

December

Well , here it is , December and in the style of advent , what astronomical presents do we have ?

On the morning of the 7th of December we are gifted with a conjunction of the Moon and Venus , which will be visible in the East before sunrise.

We take delivery of a new Moon on the 11th and this is fantastic news as the night sky will be unpolluted by Moon light as two days later old Santa drops the Geminid meteor shower down our chimney .

This is the be all and end all of meteor showers , between 2 am and 3 am on the 14th 100-120 multicoloured meteors per hour may be seen , although the shower itself runs from the 7th to the 17th so the numbers seen will gradually increase until the peak on the 13th-14th. The constellation of Gemini will be visible to the south above and to the left of Orion. Wrap up warmly , take a flask of seasonal liquid and watch the remains of asteroid 3200 Phaethon smash into our upper atmosphere.



After a week to recover we have the arrival of winter with the December Solstice and our shortest period of daylight , for those of us who celebrate such things , the solstice is at 4.48 am on the 22nd , so get those bonfires lit. But wait , another boon , the Ursid meteor shower peaks on the morning of the 22nd as well .The dust of comet Tuttle will streak across the early morning sky , this is in no way comparable to the Geminids , as there will be only 10 or so meteors an hour , radiating from the constellation of Ursa Minor in a northerly direction , it is just another excuse to be out in the dark with five layers of clothing and a jug of mead to boot.

Finally we get a full moon and of course it is on Christmas day , our final present of 2015 , this will occur at 11.11am on the 25th , and will illuminate the hopefully clear night skies for those with wobbly legs as they wend there way home.

Have a very merry Christmas and a happy new year .

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