

Our night Sky in June 2015

Venus and Jupiter are both well up in the west at sunset, but look out for them in conjunction on the 30th of the month when they will be at their closest together.

Saturn will be due south at about 11 pm at the middle of the month, and will be the brightest object in the southern sky throughout the night. However, he is low in the sky, and atmospheric turbulence might make viewing it through a telescope a little disappointing, although the rings are tilted towards us.

On March 6, Dawn became the first spacecraft to orbit a dwarf planet, and the first to orbit two extraterrestrial targets. Scientists will be comparing Ceres to giant asteroid Vesta, which Dawn studied from 2011 to 2012, in order to gain insights about the formation of our solar system. Both Vesta and Ceres, located in the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, were on their way to becoming planets before their development was interrupted.

Dawn has now finished delivering the images that have helped mission planners manoeuvre the spacecraft to its first science orbit and prepare for subsequent observations. All of the approach operations have executed flawlessly and kept Dawn on course and on schedule. Beginning April 23, Dawn will spend about three weeks in a near-circular orbit around Ceres, taking observations from 8,400 miles (13,500 kilometers) above the surface. On May 9, Dawn will begin to make its way to lower orbits to improve the view and provide higher-resolution observations.

The images show the brightest spot and its companion clearly standing out against their darker surroundings, but their composition and sources are still unknown. Scientists also see other interesting features, including heavy cratering. As Dawn gets closer to Ceres, surface features will continue to emerge at increasingly better resolution.

I hope to give you more details in the coming months. Meanwhile keep looking for the noctilucent clouds.

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