

March 2017 Highlight

The Zodiacal Light

- ★ March is the season to find the elusive “zodiacal light” in the early evening sky.
- ★ But what is zodiacal light?
- ★ Zodiacal light is the sunlight reflected from numerous dust grains located along the plane of the solar system → the ecliptic or “zodiac”.
- ★ These dust grains are left over from the formation of the solar system (a type of cosmic dust), and their supply is continuously fed by particles from comets and asteroid collisions.
- ★ The ecliptic is nearly vertical to the horizon this month, providing good viewing opportunities.

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- ★ Look for the Zodiacal Light **low in the west** (with an unobstructed view) beginning about 80 minutes after sunset. The viewing window closes about 2 hours after sunset.
- ★ Pick a **very dark location** far from artificial lights and **without moonlight**.
- ★ This spring's zodiacal light will form a **cone of pale light** that points up from the western horizon, along the ecliptic (zodiac), toward and through the planet Mars.
- ★ The best evenings without moonlight this month to see the zodiacal light will be **from March 15th– 29th**.
- ★ In the fall, when it is visible in the eastern morning sky, it is often called the “**false dawn**”.



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Zodiacal Light and the Milky Way