

Four Bright Planets Align at Dawn

- an April 2022 Sky Event from the [Astronomy Club of Asheville](#)

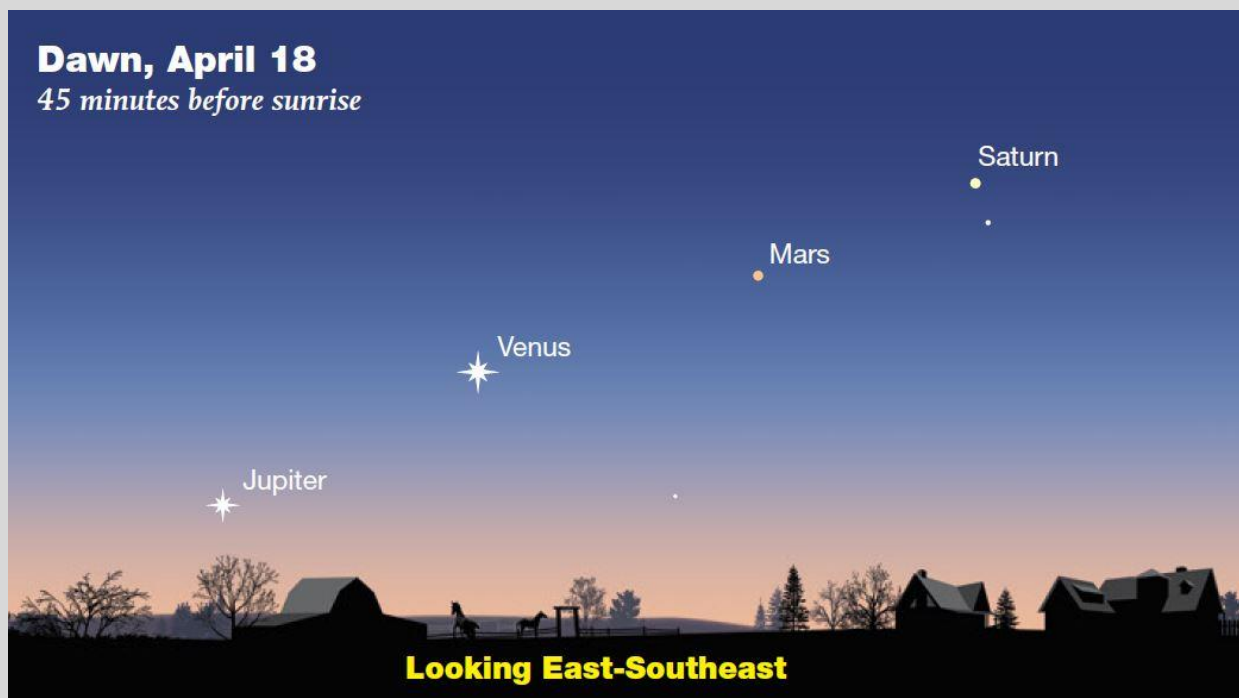


Illustration courtesy of [SKY & TELESCOPE](#)

On and around **April 18th**, the dawn skies will light up with reflected sunlight, beaming off four bright planets – two distant gas-giant orbs (Jupiter and Saturn) that will appear to sandwich two nearer and much smaller rocky worlds (Venus and Mars). This wonderful juxtaposition occurs along the “ecliptic” – the orbital plane of our solar system. It is the route that the Sun, the Moon, and the planets appear to follow across the sky, and that pathway is very evident during this wonderful dawn alignment.

Venus, the most reflective of all the planets, will be the brightest of the four, followed by Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars. It is difficult to discern a 3rd dimension while observing the sky from our 2-dimensional viewpoint, especially when some planets shine brighter than others. But try it, using the approximate distance values for the 4 planets -- that are shown below for the dates around April 18th.

Planet	Distance in millions of miles
Venus	84
Mars	158
Jupiter	538
Saturn	956

By comparison, the Sun is 93 million miles away from Earth – a distance astronomers call an “astronomical unit” or AU. Direct sunlight takes about 8 minutes and 20 seconds to reach your eyes! So, the reflected sunlight from Venus reaches your eyes in about 7½ minutes, while the reflected sunlight from Saturn left it some 86 minutes ago! Ponder that light travels at the phenomenal speed of 186,000 miles per second! ***