

Happy August, families!

August is an exciting month for stargazing. The Perseid meteor showers are most visible in the later nights and early mornings of August 11, 12, and 13. This spiritual care package gives you some information for folks of all ages on spotting shooting stars in the summer night sky. We hope that you're having a wonderful summer!

Love & light,
Children's Religious Ed

What is a meteor? Out in space, there are lots of small chunks of rock and ice that got left out when stars and planets were forming, so they just float around. Sometimes these pieces of rock get picked up by a comet, which is like an icy snowball that speeds through space, trailing rock and ice behind it like a tail. When comets come close to the sun, they fall apart a little bit, and some of their pieces of rock and ice get left behind.

As the Earth goes around the sun, our planet sometimes passes by some of this leftover comet debris. When little pieces of this debris, called meteors, come into the earth's atmosphere, they burn up, high up in the sky. When this happens, if we are standing on the ground looking up, and it's a clear night, we can see a quick streak of light in the sky. Some comets leave a lot of rocks behind, so we get to see lots of meteors in the same night. This is called a meteor shower!

What is the Perseid Meteor Shower? Every August, the Earth passes through a cloud of rocks and dust left behind from the Swift-Tuttle comet. We see lots of meteors at this time, all over the sky. We call them the Perseid meteors, because they are often seen near the constellation of Perseus in the sky.

How can you see the meteor shower? The Perseid meteor shower occurs every year from about July 23 - Aug 22. The shower's "maximum" - when the greatest number of meteors per hour fall - is usually from midnight to dawn on Aug 11, 12, or 13. You don't have to stay up that late, though; you can look anytime after dark.

Tips for spotting meteors: Wait for a clear night. Turn off as many lights as you can so it's as dark as possible. Look toward whatever part of the sky is darkest at your location. Don't use binoculars or a telescope; it's better to look at the whole sky and let your eyes move toward any motion. You'll need about 20 minutes for your eyes to totally adapt to the darker skies, so be patient. To avoid a stiff neck, bring a lawn chair, sleeping bag, or blanket.



Questions to Ponder While You Watch the Meteors

- How many meteors can your family see? Keep a count together!
- Some people like to make a wish when they see a meteor, or a "shooting star." What would you wish for: for yourself, your family, or for the world?
- Imagine where each meteor you see might have traveled in the universe before it came into the Earth's atmosphere. They might be very old and have traveled very far through our solar system and beyond.
- People all over the world are looking up at the night sky just like you, and seeing the very same meteors. Imagine another kid like you, but in another country, looking up and watching for meteors. What might be similar or different about their life, relative to yours?
- What questions about the universe do you find most interesting? Are you curious about the big bang? Dark matter? Black holes? Life on other habitable planets? Talk with your family about the mysteries that interest you.

Thoughts to Consider about Meteor Showers & the Cosmos

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night."

-- Genesis 1:1-31 ESV

"The cosmos is within us. We are made of star-stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself." -- Carl Sagan

"My God is the green tide in the spring leaves, the redness of cherries high in the air, the excitement of shooting stars, the song of birds in summer branches, the sunrise on a winter's morning, the name of everything we don't understand." -- William of Ockham

"Not only are we in the universe, the universe is in us. I don't know of any deeper spiritual feeling than what that brings upon me." -- Neil deGrasse Tyson