



FEBRUARY
2016

Evening sky in February 2016

The brightness of a star, as seen from Earth, depends not only on its distance, but also on its composition. This month the two brightest stars appear overhead. Sirius, the brightest star is 8.6 light years away while Canopus, the second brightest, lies at a distance of 310 light years. The closest star to our solar system is Alpha Centauri, one of the Pointers in the southeast below the Southern Cross (Crux). Although it is the closest star at a distance of 4.4 light years, it is the third brightest in our night sky. The faintest of all 88 constellations, Mensa (Latin for table), lies below Canopus in the South. Named in honour of Table Mountain, it was initially known as Mons Mesae (Latin for Table Mountain).

From the dark location the Large Magellanic Cloud, a satellite galaxy to our own, resembles the cloud blown over Table Mountain. To the north the Summer Hunting Scene dominates-Orion and the Dogs (Canis Major and Canis Minor) in full pursuit of the Taurus, the Bull. Planet Jupiter is in the constellation of Leo (Lion).

The Moon is in the evening sky from 11 February until 25 February.