This is the Griffith Observatory Sky Report through June 4th, 2020. Here’s what’s happening in the skies of southern California.

The planet Venus now is absent from the evening sky as it passes between earth and the sun and is too close to the glare of the sun to observe safely. It will next be visible before sunrise, starting in mid-June.

The innermost planet Mercury is the only bright planet visible currently in the early evening. Finding it will require a clear view of the west-northwest horizon. Look at 8:40 p.m. This week Mercury will be about 12 degrees above the horizon each evening at that time. It is below the bright stars Castor and Pollux in Gemini the Twins and to the right of brilliant star Capella in Auriga the Charioteer.

The phase of the moon waxes from crescent to first quarter on the 28th, and it is gibbous on the following nights through June 4th, when it is less than a day from full moon. It lights most of the night time hours as the time of moonset changes from 12:35 a.m. on May 28th to 5:37 a.m. on June 5th.
During this time, the moon will be interesting to observe through binoculars and telescopes. When the moon’s phase is close to first quarter, even a quick look through binoculars will show the two major types of lunar landscapes. These are the rugged, bright, crater-pocked highlands, and the flat grey plains, the lunar seas, or maria. The distinctive large craters Tycho, in the lunar southern highlands, and Copernicus, in the moon’s northern third, will be noticeable with nearly any optical aid when they are hit by the light of sun rise on May 30th and 31st, respectively. Those dates are when they are close to the lunar terminator, the dividing line of day and night on the moon. Due to the grazing sunlight along the terminator, shadows cast by the features there are long, and the moon’s relief is exaggerated.

By 12:30 a.m., the brilliant planets Jupiter and Saturn form an eye-catching pair of bright lights low in the southeast sky. Jupiter, the brighter member of this pair, is on the right. Saturn is about 6 degrees to the left of Jupiter. Earth’s rotation makes them arc upward and to the right together as the hours pass, so that by dawn, at about 4:30 a.m., Jupiter and Saturn are high in the south.

The International Space Station will appear high in the sky over Los Angeles on the evening of Monday, June 1st. The brilliant gleam of the ISS will first appear above the northwest horizon at 9:58 p.m. For the following three minutes it travels up and to the right, and barely misses the stars of the Big Dipper before it
vanishes into Earth’s shadow near the last star of the Big Dipper’s handle, 70 degrees above the north-northeast horizon, at 10:01 p.m.

Because of measures in place that are intended to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 Corona virus, Griffith Observatory remains closed until further notice. Consequently, all public telescopes are closed, and all public events have been cancelled. Please check the Griffith Observatory homepage for current information and continued updates of the situation.

Follow The Sky Report, All Space Considered, and Griffith Observatory, on Twitter for updates on astronomy and space-related events.

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