Uranus was discovered by William Herschel in March, 1781 (also the year that Messier published his final catalog). Herschel used a telescope of his own making that was much superior to the standards of the day. Uranus had been observed telescopically many times before, without being recognized as a planet. It may even have been observed by astronomers before the invention of the telescope. Herschel was the first to see the planet as a disk instead of a point.

A pair of binoculars or a telescope are required to see the pastel blue/green color of Uranus’ atmosphere, but the planet itself is faintly visible to the naked eye, if you can get to a dark site and know where to look.

Our first close look at Uranus and its moons came from Voyager 2 in 1986. Launched in August 1977, Voyagers 1 & 2 became two of the most successful planetary probes in history. Both are still returning data to Earth from more than 100 times the Earth-Sun distance while moving into the interstellar medium at about 10 miles/second. Will we visit Uranus & Neptune again? There is a proposal on the table.

You will find an all-sky finder chart at our web site.

A binocular finder chart for Uranus in December & January is also available.
Monthly Meetings
The MSO hosts monthly public-observing sessions, each with a kick-off 40 minute presentation in the Chemistry-Physics Building. The presentations will take place even on cloudy nights. If the sky is clear, the observatory will open after the talk! Can’t make the SkyTalk? Then come after!

Next month:
January 9, 2020 - 7:00 PM - Chem-Phys Room 155

Kentucky SkyTalk
Dr. Gary Ferland— University of Kentucky
Thursday - December 12, 2019 7:00 PM
Chemistry-Physics Building Room 155

The Star of Bethlehem
The Gospel of Matthew records a peculiar astronomical event that occurred at the birth of Christ. Could the “Christmas Star” have been a nova, a supernova, a comet, or some other spectacular sight? I will talk about what was visible around the time of the birth of Christ, and describe Kepler’s idea that that the Star was a planet alignment that guided the “wise men from the East.”

Tonight’s Kentucky SkyTalk is part of an ongoing series. These are presented by the UK Department of Physics and Astronomy, and the MacAdam Student Observatory. Held every 2nd Thursday of the month, they are always free and open to the public.

Kepler’s Trigon from De Stella Nova in Pede Serpentarii, published in 1606. The title refers to the last naked-eye supernova seen in the Milky Way. The diagram depicts close encounters between Saturn and Jupiter that occur at roughly 20 year intervals.