

How the Heavens Have Already Started the Countdown to Pentecost

Pentecost Sunday is not until May 20, but the countdown to Pentecost in the heavens has already begun with the Eta Aquariid meteor shower.

Historically the church has celebrated the nine-day period from Christ's ascension to the day before Pentecost as a time of preparation counting down to Pentecost. This period, known as a "novena", follows Easter by 40 days and will begin on May 11 this year. However, the date of Easter is set based on the lunar calendar and as a result the nine-day countdown to Pentecost can begin from the last week of April to the beginning of June in any given year. This period corresponds with the active period of the Eta Aquariid meteor shower, counting down to Pentecost.

As important as the timing of the meteor shower is the place where it occurs, the constellation Aquarius. The Feast of Pentecost is memorialized in the heavens by the constellation Aquarius (the water pourer), picturing a man pouring out water representing the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39) which was poured out on Pentecost. The two brightest stars of Aquarius, Sadalmalik (the record of the pouring out) and Sadalsuud (the pourer out) confirm this understanding. The Eta Aquariid meteor shower is named after the star denoted with the Greek letter *eta* near the water urn pictured in Aquarius. Thus, the meteors seem to be coming from the urn pouring out the Holy Spirit, a celestial picture of Pentecost.

So the Eta Aquariid meteor shower gives us a picture of the Holy Spirit showering down from heaven during the period counting down to Pentecost.

The Eta Aquariid meteor shower is visible just before dawn on the eastern horizon. The shower contains debris from the famous Halley's Comet, which returns every 76 years and last appeared in 1986. Its peak is anticipated to occur on May 6, although there may be higher activity on May 3 and May 5 because of the gravitational influence of Jupiter on the tail of Halley's Comet in 164 B.C. and A.D. 218.

So if you are up before dawn and see an Eta Aquariid meteor streak across the sky, remember to spend some time with God to begin your personal countdown to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit celebrated on Pentecost Sunday. {eo}

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