

From your Editor

Those who believe in fate often think that there is someone out there for everyone and if you are open to it, that perfect mate is out there somewhere for you. You also have the evidence that it will happen because many of your friends have found that person for themselves. So you think "Someday it will happen". However, it is one thing for you to believe that, and it is completely different for you to be sitting across the table having dinner with that person and for it to hit you that the quest is over.

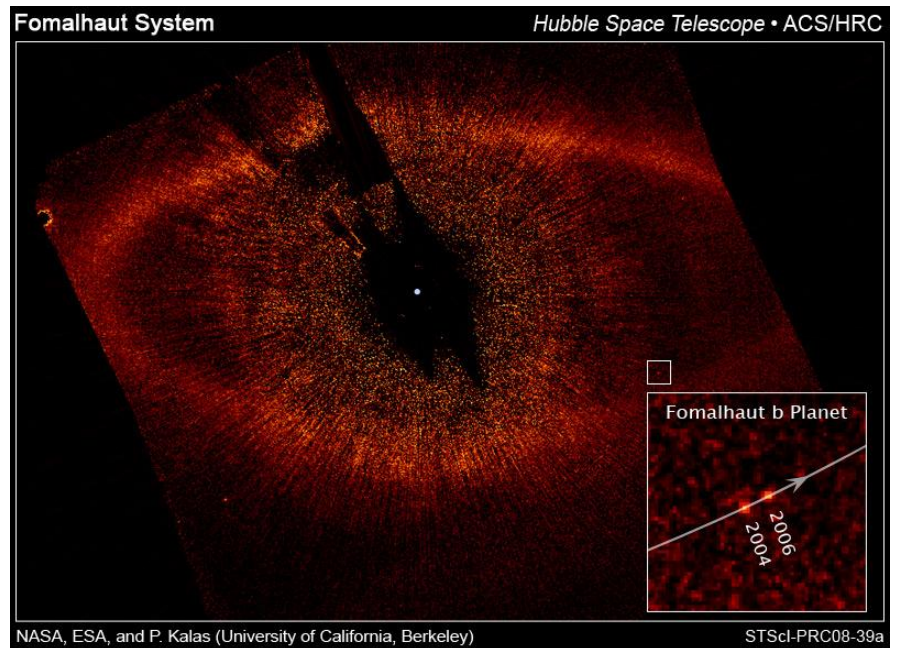
It is the same with astronomy. It is one thing to look at all the evidence, do the calculations and deduce that there must be lots planets and life out there. It is even more compelling when you find planets through indirect means – velocity studies have found at least 300 extra-solar planets. However, November saw the release of a Hubble Space Telescope image actually showing an extra-solar planet in visible light for the first time.

When we do find life in the Universe, it will be just like meeting that special person. We will want to know more and more. We may not understand everything we learn, but it will be exciting and will be as if a whole new existence has begun. History will mark time as before and after the discovery just as people mark their lives as before and after they meet their mate. We have now booked the table at the restaurant; we'll see where the events take us.

Mel Blake

Director UNA Planetarium and
Observatory.

Image of the Month



This image from the Hubble Space Telescope is of the star Fomalhaut, in the constellation Piscis Austrinus. The small box at lower right shows the position of Fomalhaut B, the planetary companion to the star. It is the first visible-light image of a planet outside the solar system. The bright star has had its light blocked using a disk. The planet was first detected in 2004, and astronomers took additional data in 2006 to verify that the planet indeed showed motion in its orbit. The planet orbits in about 872 years and is about three times the size of Jupiter. 25 light years away, Fomalhaut is about 2.5 times the mass of the Sun and is easily seen with the unaided eye (see this month's star map.) On the same day images from Keck observatory showed three planets around the star HR8799. **Image courtesy NASA.**

Astro Quote: Two possibilities exist: Either we are alone in the Universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying. Arthur C. Clarke.

Program Times

The Planetarium Public Nights will start at 7:30PM. The Star of Bethlehem shows will take place at 1:00PM, 2:30PM and 4:00PM on the given days. There is no observing component for that program.

Calendar for Dec. 2008

Dec. 2nd..... Planetarium Public Night

Dec. 9th..... Planetarium Public Night

Dec. 13th.... Geminid Meteors.

Dec. 16th.....Planetarium Public Night.

Dec. 19th.... Star of Bethlehem Program.

Dec. 20thStar of Bethlehem Program.

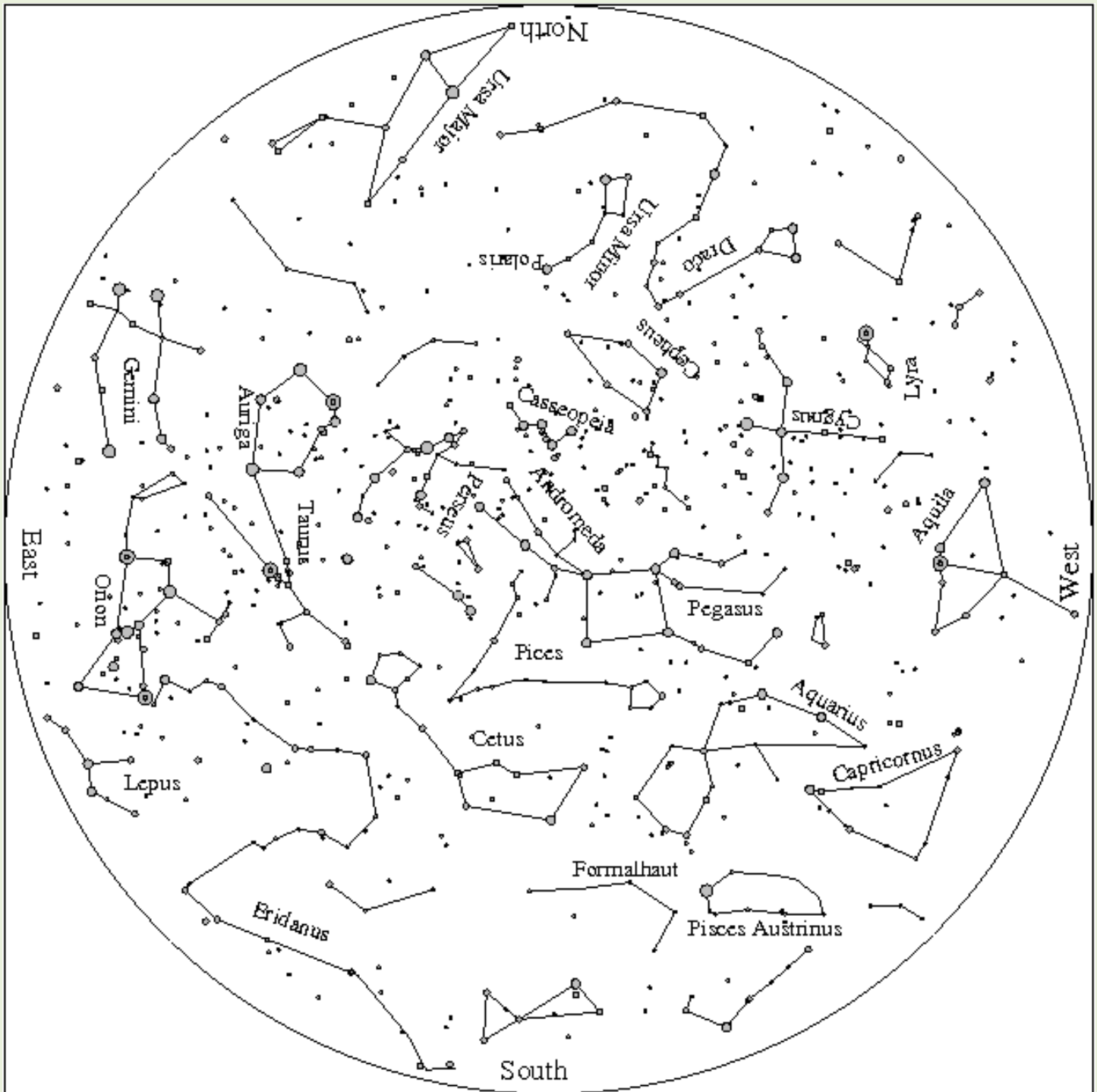
Dec. 21stStar of Bethlehem Program.

Dec 21st Winter Solstice.

Dec. 22rd ..Star of Bethlehem Program.

Dec. 23rd ..Star of Bethlehem Program.

The December 2008 Sky for North Alabama



How to use this Chart: The sky is shown for 8:00PM, December 15th for Florence, Alabama. It will appear this way one hour earlier for each week difference in time. The stars brightness's are represented by different sized dots. The faintest stars you can see are the small dots; the brightest ones are large dots. Hold the chart with the direction you are facing down. So if you are facing north, hold the chart with north down. The circle represents the horizon and the center of the chart the point directly over your head. So an object half-way between the center and edge of the chart is half-way up in the sky. This chart was prepared using the SkyNow software of R. M. Blake. This chart may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes with the following acknowledgement included: Courtesy UNA Planetarium and Observatory. <http://www2.una.edu/planetarium/>.