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This is an open-source tool which traces the positions of the Sun, Earth and Moon over the course of each eclipse and traces the path of the Moon's shadow across the Earth's surface. It was written by the author and freely available for download from GitHub.

EclipseSimulator takes the positions of each body from the JPL DE430 planetary ephemeris. It treats the Earth and Moon as ellipsoids with the same polar and equatorial radii which are also assumed by Fred Espenak's eclipse predictions. All eclipse predictions are made at sea level. The predictions here match those calculated by Xavier Jubier to within a few kilometers.

When the moon passes between the sun and Earth creating a total solar eclipse April 8, many Catholics in its path will be looking skyward to observe the phenomenon from a spiritual and scientific perspective.

Some will gather at retreat centers like Our Lady of the Pines in Fremont, Ohio, to reflect on the eclipse as a metaphor for the darkness and shadow in their own lives, while others, like a group of students at The Catholic University of America who will be studying the eclipse in collaboration with NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, will take a more methodical approach.

A partial solar eclipse will be visible throughout North America and Central America on April 8, but only those in what is known as the "path of totality" will be able to observe the sun completely eclipsed by the moon.

At the Vatican Observatory, the total eclipse won't be viewable at the two locations, through the main telescope on Mount Graham in Arizona or through the historic telescopes at Castel Gandolfo south of Rome, so staff members will be doing what everyone else is doing: going to the path of totality to see the eclipse.

Two of them -- Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, observatory director, and Christopher Graney, an astronomer and adjunct scholar -- will be in Bloomington, Indiana, as presenters for a four-day "Faith and Science" retreat at Mother of the Redeemer Retreat Center. Besides Mass and morning and evening prayer, the retreat will include talks on such topics as "Astronomy and the Vatican" and "Where Faith and Science Can Meet," along with opportunities for stargazing and, of course, viewing the eclipse.

The Vatican Observatory's Graney said people still look to the universe for symbolism and meaning, as they did in biblical times. "If you believe God created the universe," he said, "then the study of the universe is the study of God's work, and it will teach you something about God; just as if you study a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, you will learn something about da Vinci."

He added, "There is always something interesting going on in the sky. Sometimes that thing is spectacular and

interesting, and everyone knows about it, like the eclipse; sometimes it is subtle and interesting and only astronomy nerds know about it."

Graney said the star of Bethlehem, for instance, was not the spectacular thing often imagined. "[The Gospel] says the star was subtle, something only noticed by "nerds" like the Magi. Herod had to ask them when it appeared. … If the star had been spectacular, everyone would have known when it appeared. Given that, are we going to sift every subtle thing in the sky for some great meaning? There are people who do that. It hasn't been very productive for them. The Church has throughout its history condemned such stuff.”

"There's nothing we have found that specifically ties an eclipse to spirituality," Osborne told the Register. "However, if you think about it, there are a lot of metaphors between darkness and light." She added, eclipses often signify beginnings or endings and are times to bring people together, reminding them of their interconnectedness with each other and with God.

For their part, students in Catholic University's Physics and Applied Space Weather Research program will be immersed in the science of the eclipse as they deploy magnetometers to measure magnetic fields in six remote locations along the path of totality both during and after the phenomenon. Using their instruments, they also hope to see if any space weather effects are observable from the ground during the eclipse.

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Web: <https://sumthingtasty.co.za/contact-us/>

Email: energystorage2000@gmail.com

WhatsApp: 8613816583346

