



FAITH matters

April 22, 2024

Faith matters when contemplating the course of the sun and moon from our vantage point on Earth. The light from the distant sun shines on the earth and on our moon. As the earth rotates we have day and night. As the moon orbits the Earth we see the phases of the moon as reflected sunlight from its surface. This bit of astronomical physics gives us the measure of time.

As it turns out, there are times in which the moon gets in the way of the sun from our vantage point on earth: a solar eclipse. Our position in the solar system is unique because there are times when the moon perfectly obscures the disk of the sun. What are the chances? How are we so lucky? The diameter of the sun is 400 times larger than the moon's, but the sun is also 400 times farther away from us than the moon is. We could have had no moons, or moons too small or too far away. As it is, we have a moon exactly the right size to cause total eclipses from our vantage point on earth. And that's just now: millions of years ago the moon was too close (it would eclipse the sun, but also the sun's corona), and millions of years from now the moon will be too far away to cause total solar eclipses. We're living not only in just the right location, but at the right time.

A solar eclipse is a fantastic event to witness. People travel far and wide to see such an event. To see a full solar eclipse where the moon perfectly blocks out the light from the sun is awesome and also a bit scary. Within the space of a few minutes the sun literally goes dark; a bright sunny day goes to the deepest night. During totality, it is dark as night and the moon is black. Now, with your unprotected eye you can look directly at the sun. You see a black disk, and a wispy white corona, but this time (in April 2024) there was an additional treat: bright red lights at the periphery, easily visible to the unaided eye. These are solar prominences, arcs of gas

shooting up from the sun's surface, and only visible because the moon was perfectly blocking the overwhelming brightness of the sun.

Ruth and I have now seen two solar eclipses, one in Montana (2017) and the other in Ohio just a few weeks ago. We will never forget these awesome spectacles of our universe in action. The sun comes back as expected and life goes on. But we know that the universe and our small part of it is in good hands. Praise God from whom all blessings flow..

~Written by Keith Griffioen

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