

**By Vernon Whetstone**

*Amateur Astronomer*

Wednesday was Groundhog Day, a day where, if weather lore holds true, we found out how much winter we have left.

You know the story of the groundhog being able to predict how much winter is left don't you? If it is sunny and the little critter sees his shadow he is frightened and runs back into his hole for another six weeks of winter. If it is cloudy and there is no shadow, he stays out and winter will end in six weeks.

The idea comes from ancient folk lore brought to this country by European settlers and is mostly centered with the Pennsylvania Dutch country.

Feb. 2 is also what is called Candlemass, in the church calendar, or the Feast of the Presentation, celebrating the infant Jesus being presented in the Jewish temple. In the Eastern Orthodox Church it marks the end of the Epiphany season.

It is what the almanac calls a "Cross-quarter day," or a day that is halfway between the winter solstice and the vernal, or spring, equinox.

Ancient weather lore says:

If Candlemas be fair and bright,

Winter will have another flight.

If Candlemas be cloud and rain

Winter will be gone and not come again.

However, if you count the weeks in the calendar, there are six weeks of winter left regardless of whether the little beast sees his shadow or not. But, I guess it is as good a reason for a party as any.

Spring, the vernal equinox, in the northern hemisphere begins at 5:21 p.m, March 20, when the Sun crosses the celestial equator traveling from south to north bringing longer days and shorter nights.

In the southern hemisphere the season transition is from summer to autumn and I am sure they will be glad, judging from all the really bad storms and flooding they have been experiencing.

SKY WATCH: New Moon today. Don't forget, on Friday, Feb. 4, Jupiter's moon, Ganymede, will come out of Jupiter's shadow at about 6:12 p.m. MST as seen from southwest Nebraska.

Binoculars will work for locating it, but for a really good look, a telescope will enhance the experience.

The four major moons of Jupiter are Callisto, the outermost of the four, which will be the top moon, Ganymede is next and you will see it when it comes out of the shadow.

Io and Europa are the next two in order and are below the planet. All four run in a straight line from above to below Jupiter.

The process won't last long, about 10 minutes so be ready and be looking.

NEXT WEEK: More astronomical blathering.

