By Vernon Whetstone

Amateur Astronomer

I don't necessarily hold with the idea of astrology. The notion that the location of the Sun, planets, and the stars can mean anything as far as having an affect on our lives is a little out there. I am a great science fiction fan, but all of that is a little far out even for even me.

Having said that, I now want to say the stars do hold some predictive indications involving seasonal changes and events on Earth.

For example, when the ancient Egyptians saw the star Sirius rising with the Sun they knew it was the season for the Nile to flood. The ancient Greeks also knew this was the beginning of what they called the "Dog Days" of summer.

The ancient Polynesian cultures watched the location and appearing of certain stars to indicate good sailing seasons and many cultures used the rising of stars to tell the time of the night.

Other ancient cultures before there were calendars used the rising or setting of certain stars, star clusters, or other astronomical objects to indicate a particular season of the year or as the time to plant or harvest.

So we see that while not necessarily predictive for an individual, there are come cultural events the stars can show us.

For instance, right now, in the middle of winter, we can see what season has passed, what is, and what is coming by using the stars

The stars of autumn: Pegasus, Cetus, and Aquarius "a season which has passed" are sinking in the west at sunset.

The stars of winter; Taurus, Orion, and Gemini "the current season" are high in the south at mid-evening, and the stars of spring; Cancer, Leo, and Virgo are rising at sunset.

Now, let's not forget summer, the one season, which after these 20 below zero temperatures we are all looking forward to. The summer stars; Scorpius, Sagittarius, and Capricornus are rising at sunrise in the east.

The other summer stars are rising even earlier. By 4:30 a.m. MST, our old friends, the Summer Triangle of Cygnus, the Swan; Aquila, the Eagle; and Lyra, the Harp are all above the horizon for our viewing pleasure and anticipation.

Just as an aside, I had occasion to be driving east very early before sunrise recently and observed a very bright star just over the eastern horizon. Not really being all that familiar yet with the morning stars I wasn't sure what it was.

At first guess I was thinking Regulus in Leo. Later when I had a chance to consult a star chart I was surprised to discover it was Virgo, the brightest star in Lyra, the Harp. Our old friend from

the Summer Triangle.

If you were watching the risings and settings of these stars over a period of time you would be able to match them to seasonal events and develop your own calendar.

SKY WATCH: Full Moon, Friday, Feb. 18. Just after sunset on Feb. 17, watch as the Moon rises near the bright star Regulus, the brightest star in Leo, the Lion and they progress across the sky together.

On Sunday, Feb. 20 and Monday, Feb. 21 watch as the Moon moves on to another bright star, Spica, the brightest star in Virgo, the Maiden.

Jupiter and Uranus can no longer be seen in the same binocular field of view but they are still close (about nine degrees apart) in the early evening sky.

Saturn is starting to make an appearance in the late evening sky. The best time to look is after 11p.m. MST in the east.

On Sunday, Feb. 20, the just past full Moon will be near the ringed planet to give you an idea of where to find it. Wait a few days for the Moon to get out of the way before using that new telescope you got for Christmas for an absolutely stunning view. Dazzling Venus is still the queen of the morning sky blazing away in the southeast before sunrise.

NEXT WEEK: More astronomical blathering.