

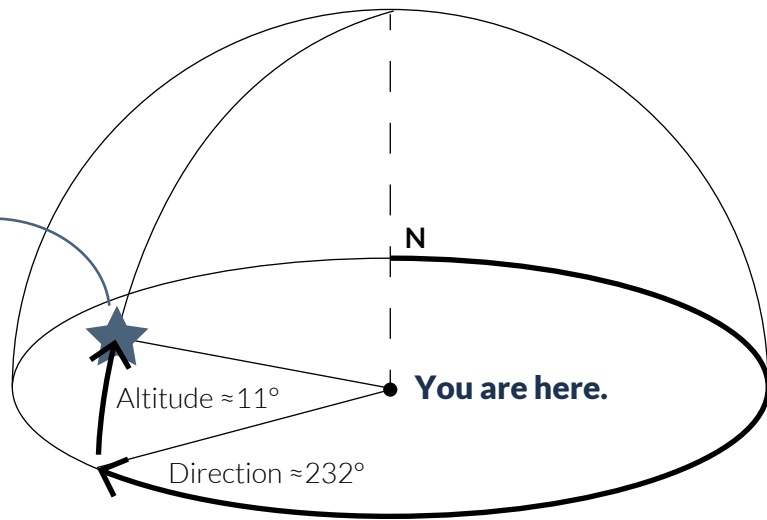
How Columbia residents can observe the 'Christmas star' on Dec. 21

Jupiter and Saturn, two gas giants in the solar system, will **appear as a single star Dec. 21** in what is called the **"Great Conjunction."** Legend has it this rare conjunction was behind the star of Bethlehem referenced in the Christian Bible's Christmas story. Here's how Columbia residents can see the two planets' **closest visible encounter** in nearly **800 years**.

JESSICA BLAKE, ALEXIS ALLISON/Missourian

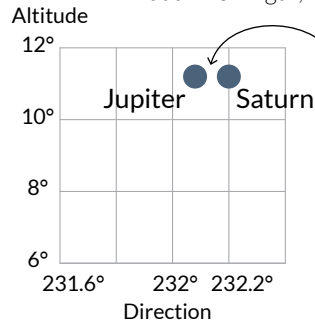
Sources: Space.com, NASA, Missourian reporting

There are two factors to consider when searching for the Great Conjunction. Put simply, **direction** is where you face in relation to true North, and **altitude** is how high the planets are in the sky.



Around 6 p.m., grab a compass and find true North (0°), then **turn Southwest** (≈232°). Finally, **tilt your head up** — the Great Conjunction will occur low in the sky (≈11°).

Here's how close Jupiter and Saturn **will appear to be** — about "the thickness of a dime held at arm's length," according to NASA.



In Columbia, we won't be able to see the planets when they're at their closest because that'll happen around noon — but they'll still be very close come evening.

From a god's eye view, **here's what's really happening:**

