

October 4, Ordinary 27A (Psalm 19)

The star-spangled skies, when I can see them, tell me of the glory of God.

by [Kit Carlson](#) in the [October 2026](#) issue

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We raised our children in the suburbs of Washington, DC, a huge, blazing metropolis that shines all night long, erasing any view of the stars. Even on the darkest night, we could count only one, two, maybe five, maybe ten stars from our front stoop.

So in summertime, when we visited my family's cabin in the far north woods of Michigan's Upper Peninsula, we had a ritual, starting from when our son and daughter were just toddlers. They would go to bed as usual, though with the sun still up because we were so far north and so far west. But then close to midnight, when it was finally, truly dark, my husband and I would wake the children up and take them out to the yard.

"Come, see the stars," we would whisper in their ears, carrying them, still swathed in their blankets, out into the darkness.

And as they blinked slowly, looking up into the black night, there it was: a firmament of spangled light. There was the Milky Way, a ribbon of radiance winding from northeast to southwest. There was the Big Dipper, and all the stars that make up the rest of Ursa Major, the Great Bear. There were the constellations Cassiopeia and Cygnus, the stars Altair and Vega, and millions of other stars whose names we did not know. The heavens indeed were telling the glory of God, and that was a story we wanted to inscribe into our children's memories year after year, every summer that we could.

Decades later, a friend from the city came to visit us at that summer cabin in the woods. The night sky made her uneasy. "The stars here are so oppressive," she said, going back inside and flipping on all the lights.

I wondered: How could she not hear the tale of the night sky, the silent sound that extends into all lands, the unspoken words that reach to the end of the world? The mystery of creation is right there, a whole, unending expanse of burning stars, galaxies, planets so bright they hurt your eyes. How could anyone not feel awe and wonder, a conviction that there is a Creator grand and powerful enough to set a whole universe into motion, a sense that any attempt to approach that Creator must be presumption?

But maybe all of that is too much for those who have spent their whole lives in the security of artificial light. Maybe the vastness of the universe really is oppressive, even fear-inducing, once you get a chance to actually see it. Maybe it's better not to see, not to know. After all, 80 percent of people in the United States can no longer see the Milky Way at all, according to a 2016 article in *Science Advances*, as light pollution increases year after year.

Why bother to look up when the night sky is just a blank dome of semidarkness dotted here and there with a few flecks of starlight? Why not just look down into the glowing blue light of a phone, a human-created world filled with billions of other humans who are also looking down into a human-generated, human-obsessed world?

Light pollution has erased our birthright: the star-coated infinity of the night sky. It has erased along with it that sense of transcendence and awe that only comes from gazing into the vastness of space. And it has erased any

sense of proportion—a sense that the universe is infinite, and we are not. The skies are ageless and enduring, and we are not. God is God, and we are not.

It is a long journey now for most people in the United States to find a place of dark sky and infinite stars. West of the Mississippi River, away from towns and cities, is your best bet. Or at the northern border of the nation, along the 49th parallel. Or in the deepest mountain woods of Maine. Or out at sea, not on a blazing cruise ship but on a small sailboat, perhaps. An online dark sky map can help pinpoint those few, far-flung spots of darkness, if you want to see for yourself.

If you can get to such a place and look up, you will know what the psalmist meant: *The heavens are telling the glory of God*. And that sense of overwhelming awe could very well lead you into your own rumination on the nature of God, and how human beings ought to honor God and care for each other, and how small you really are, and how perhaps you hope that your own insignificant, halting reflections might be acceptable in the sight of God, our strength and our redeemer.