

# Mercury Visits the Beehive Star Cluster at Dusk

On the evening of July 6<sup>th</sup>, the speedy and elusive planet **Mercury** will stop over at the Beehive star cluster in the direction of the zodiac constellation Cancer- the Crab. The 68% illuminated disk of the planet (a waning gibbous phase) is located about 101 million miles from Earth that night. Because it is located only 5 degrees above the N-NW horizon about 50 minutes after sunset, find an unobstructed view, and use binoculars to help you locate it and the star cluster. Mercury shines at a reasonably bright magnitude of -0.2 on this evening, but it sets early (about 10:12 p.m.).

The **Beehive star cluster**, is designated as Messier object 44 (M44), and it is one of the nearest open clusters to our solar system. Located some 610 light years away, it is visible to the unaided eye under a dark sky, when it is positioned higher off the horizon. With binoculars it shines spectacularly!

