

NASA confirms next Friday for Webb Space Telescope launch

December 17 2021, by Marcia Dunn



In this Saturday, Dec. 11, 2021 photo released by the European Space Agency, NASA's James Webb Space Telescope is secured on top of the Ariane 5 rocket that will launch it to space from Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson confirmed Friday that the James Webb Space Telescope will attempt to blast off on Christmas Eve. A European Ariane rocket will provide the lift from South America's French Guiana. Credit: M.Pedoussaut/ESA via AP, File

NASA is shooting for next Friday—Christmas Eve—to launch its newest space telescope.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson confirmed Friday that the James Webb Space Telescope will attempt to blast off on Dec. 24. A European Ariane rocket will provide the lift from South America's French Guiana.

The \$10 billion Webb—considered the successor to the Hubble Space Telescope—was supposed to soar Saturday, but was jolted by a clamp during launch preparations, resulting in a four-day delay. Then a bad communication link on the rocket had to be fixed, postponing the launch another two days.

U.S. and European space officials signed off Friday on the launch date, following one last round of testing.

Nelson expects a smaller crowd at the launch site because of the holidays. Liftoff is scheduled for 7:20 a.m. EST.

"Since it's Christmas Eve, all the congressional delegations that were going down, all of that has evaporated," he told The Associated Press. Even the NASA and contractor team has dwindled, he noted. But he'll be there.

Already years late in flying, Webb will look back to almost the beginning of time, to when the first stars and galaxies were forming, while also examining the atmospheres of planets orbiting stars closer to home. NASA is partnering with the European and Canadian space agencies on the mega project.

"There's so much riding on this," Nelson said, "opening up just all kinds of new understanding and revelations about the universe."

Is there a better Christmas present than seeing the telescope launch? Nelson answered by breaking into song: "All I want for Christmas are not my two front teeth, but for the success of JWST"—referring to the telescope by its acronym.

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