

Star of Wonder

This was the year we aimed a telescope so far out into space that the pictures coming back may have traveled from almost where time began. I can't even grasp what that means, but I know what I saw: blackness, yes, but also light, lots of light, and color and beauty. This much we now know is there. But what else?

Sometimes I wonder: Is there love way out there? Is there kindness, gratitude, hope? Do these things exist way out there? Is there joy? I know I'm not the first to ask.



Every December I'm haunted by an ancient scene. The night is moonless, and there is nothing all around but sand, sky, and stillness. You know how it goes. Three men on camels pause and pull their robes a little closer against the cold. I hear the camels breathing, their hooves shifting in the sand, the sand scuttling around their hooves, and I feel a gust of wind sting the men's eyes as they look up at the stars.

They have traveled, the story goes, a long way together. There is plenty to fear, for the night seems all but empty, yet even if they *are* afraid, and at times they surely must be, they remember what they share and move on.



When I was growing up, winter nights would sometimes find my family bundled up outdoors, just between the house and the car, while my father and my brother searched the sky for the North Star. Once they found it, we would all go silent, our boots crunching in the snow, our faces turned upward, just for a moment, before the cold—and the holiday spirit—hurried us along toward our destination.



As we pause this winter and come together, let's keep in mind the wonders that transcend both space and time. No matter what else (And who knows what else?), a perfect light surrounds us, standing up to the darkness and holding us, all of us, in its vast embrace.

