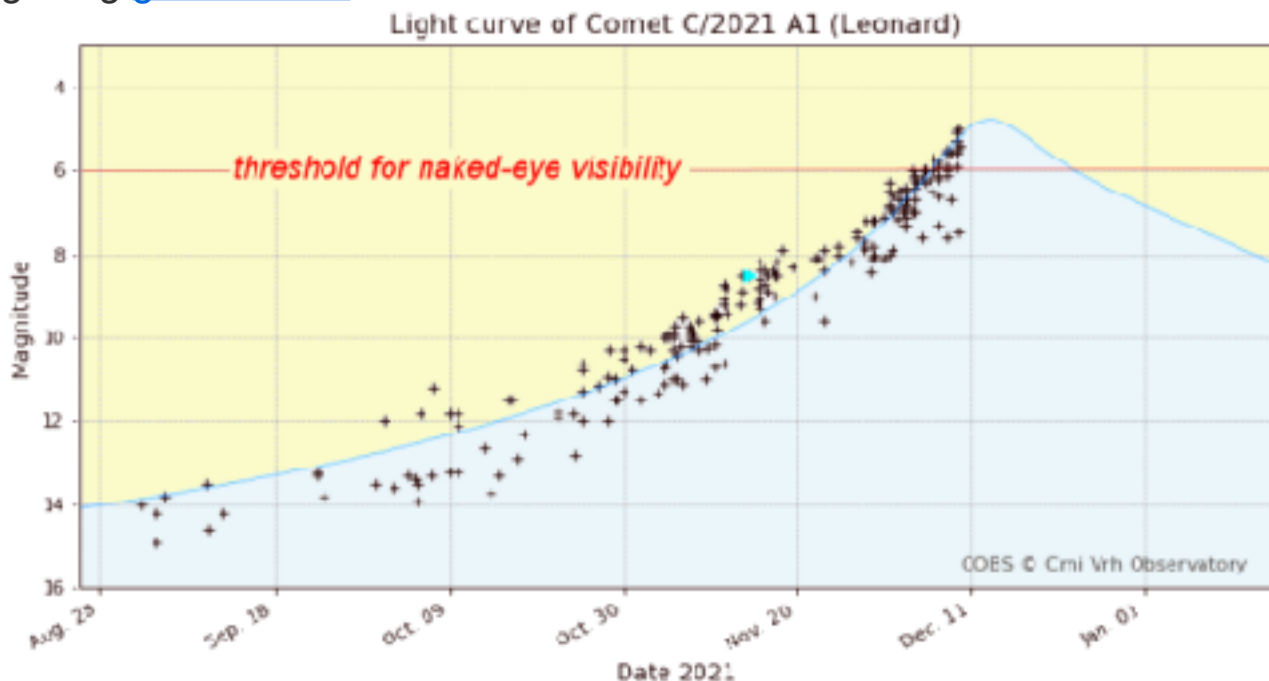


COMET LEONARD UPDATE: Comet Leonard (C/2021 A3) is approaching Earth for a close encounter (35 million km away) on Dec. 12th. Since Monday the comet has nearly tripled in brightness, [now magnitude +5](#), making it an easy target for backyard telescopes. Amateur astronomer Michael Jaeger sends this picture from Turmkogel, Austria. (Prepare to scroll, because the tail is more than 10 degrees long.)



Jaeger took the picture on the edge of a winter storm. "I drove for many kilometers to find a break in the clouds," he says. At the time of the exposure, I was 1100 meters above sea level with minus 6 degrees temperature, strong wind and snowy air."

He forgot to mention it was also 4 o'clock in the morning. That's when you have to wake up to find the comet. Comet Leonard is currently [in the constellation Serpens](#) diving toward the morning sun. The early hour and decreasing altitude can make Comet Leonard a challenge to photograph despite its growing brightness, but astronomers are getting [good results](#).



Above: The blue curve traces the predicted brightness of Comet Leonard. Crosses are recent observations. Credit: [Comet Observation Database](#)

The predicted light curve of Comet Leonard has it peaking between 4th and 5th magnitude on Dec. 12th. This is technically above the threshold of naked-eye visibility and, indeed, some seasoned observers have [reported](#) seeing the comet from very dark sites. However, the comet is dim. For best results, use binoculars or a telescope. What's next? Six days after its close approach to Earth, Comet Leonard will pass by Venus even closer -- less than 4.3 million km away. On Dec. 18th, telescopes on Earth can see that flyby in the evening sky just after sunset