



Some of you are probably familiar with Chip and Joanna Gaines, hosts of the popular television show, “Fixer Upper” that ended its run on television earlier this fall (re-runs abound, and of course it can be watched online, but no more new shows). In a recent article in a magazine they started, called “The Magnolia Journal,” Joanna tells the story of how she had, and lost, a sense of “wonder” in her life. Here’s what she writes,

It all started with two words, ‘Dear Jojo,’ at the top of a letter my dad wrote inside the cover of a small Bible he gave to me the night before I left for a semester in New York City. He also had my name embossed in gold on the cover. It was...my first time moving away from home and I was a nervous wreck. This gift from my dad was his way of telling me, ‘You’ve got this.’ And I believed him. I carried that Bible with me...everywhere. It was a constant comfort. I must have read that note a hundred times during those days.

Years later [long after returning to her home town in Texas]...a friend asked to borrow this pocket-sized Bible for a mission trip to Boston. I hesitated. It had become one of my most valued possessions. But in the end, I felt silly that I debated sharing a Bible of all things, and I...lent it to her. When my friend returned from the trip, through tears she told me that she had lost my Bible in Boston. She knew how much it had meant to me. I was devastated, but I kept it together. Soon after I bought an identical Bible and even had my dad write a similar note, but it wasn’t the same.”ⁱ

We all have experienced a similar sense of wonder/inspiration...and the loss...that she had with that Bible and the note from her dad. It meant a lot to her, and it was a terrible loss in her life when she lost the Bible and lost the sense of wonder that she had from it.

The Christmas event is one that inspires wonder in many people, and has since the day Jesus was born. Some people continue to have that sense of wonder in regards to Jesus: some on a daily or near-daily basis, others it’s a

once-a-year feeling around Christmas or maybe also at Easter...or still for others the sense of wonder they had about Jesus has been lost and gone for a long time, like Joanna's Bible.

That doesn't mean that our sense of wonder in general is gone. We all are amazed by and in awe and wonder at different things in our lives. For instance, *have you ever wondered:*

- ...why Doctors call what they do "practice"?
- ...who tastes dog food when it has a "new & improved" flavor?
- ...why the professor on Gilligan's Island can make a radio out of a coconut, but can't he fix a hole in a boat?
- If corn oil is made from corn, and vegetable oil is made from vegetables, then have you ever wondered what baby oil is made from?
- ...why you don't ever see the headline: "Psychic Wins Lottery"?ⁱⁱ

And it's been like this for many years. Even in Jesus' day there was a great sense of wonder at things. In fact, do you know what kind of bread Jesus used to feed the crowds when he used just a few loaves and some fish?

Wonder bread. 😊

Of course, we also have wonder at amazing feats and accomplishments by people – in music, dance, business, athletics, service to others, and so forth. A few weeks ago, Russell Wilson spontaneously carried out a play on the football field, along with his running, back Mike Davis that inspired a sense of wonder. In case you missed it, I want to play it for you in a moment. And if you're not really into football, you just need to know that Russell is supposed to throw the ball to a receiver on this play, but the pressure from the defense comes fast and furious, and he has to run for his life (not that that's anything unusual for him the last few years), changing the play on the fly, and completely improvising the run and the rest of the play. You will not see a play like this from another NFL quarterback this year...or maybe in the next decade. It's that unusual. **(If you're reading this online, you can watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkEbdkCFQHA>)**

As I said: **It's a play that inspired great awe and wonder because of its unusual nature.** But it's close as to whether or not it was legal by NFL rules, because the ball seems to be caught forward from where Russell pitched it,

which because they are downfield from where the play started, is not allowed. The only legal way for him to throw the ball to someone at that point is to pass it backwards. But in the speed of the live action, the referees did not see it as a forward pass, there was no penalty, and the game continued from there. As a result, there was immediately a lot of controversy about the play, with most believing it should have been ruled an illegal forward pass.

Well, head coach Pete Carroll thought it was legal and wanted to prove it. So the day after the game, he reached out to world-renowned astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson, asking him to verify the trajectory of the ball. Isn't that just what the NFL needs – an astrophysicist to bring clarity to the playing field? Neil shared his verdict via Twitter a day later:

“FYI: The lateral that @DangeRussWilson threw to @MikeDavisRB in Sunday’s @Seahawks @Eagles game was a legit “Galilean Transformation”. In their reference frame, the ball went backwards. It’s not their fault they ran forward faster than the ball.” See the tweet here:

<https://twitter.com/neiltyson/status/938155412347588610?lang=en>

All of a sudden, the world of physics and the world of football were colliding in a way they hadn't before (usually “physics” conversations in football are about the collisions between 350 pound defensive linemen and 220 pound quarterbacks). And sports radio hosts, sports reporters at newspapers, tv stations, online...even some of the players...all of a sudden they were all having to answer this question, **“What is a Galilean Transformation?”**

Well, I did the research this past week, and so I'll explain this to you as plainly as possible: it's a set of mathematical formulas devised by, and named after, Galileo...and essentially they are the math that explains that if I'm traveling in a car that's going 60 mph, and toss a ball across the car and back a row to my kid sitting on the other side of the car, even though the ball goes straight across in relationship to the two of us, it has also traveled down the freeway a ways in a diagonal line, (or perhaps in a bit of a curve?) because the car is moving 60 mph, and so is the ball. It's the same thing here in this play. When the ball leaves his hands, it leaves him at a backwards angles – that's clear in a couple of the slow-motion replays. But the ball is clearly

caught about a yard downfield (forward) from where he lets it go, with his forward momentum being transferred to the ball.

So, there was a great sense of wonder at the play itself, and then there was a sense of wonder over the controversy about whether or not it really was a legal play, and then there was some wonder over a world-renowned astrophysicist weighing in on the NFL and concluding that Russell experienced “a legit Galilean Transformation.” There’s wonder all over the place here. **But within another day or so, just as Joanna could not regain the wonder of the note from her dad inside her Bible that was lost: All the sense of wonder and amazement around this play quickly faded away. It was lost.**

The world moved on from it – until tonight, because I’m resurrecting it. Christmas is about Jesus, and Jesus specializes in resurrections - amen? This phrase “Galilean Transformation” caught my attention, because, it occurs to me that: **In Jesus, there was a type of Galilean Transformation that took place 2,000 years ago.** It has nothing to do with Galileo (though there may be some crossover to that, actually, as well).

Although Jesus was born in Bethlehem, just outside Jerusalem, He was raised up in Nazareth, in the Galilean region of Israel, near the Sea of Galilee. And just as the Galilean Transformation’s mathematical equations are about the movement of objects in a space-time continuum, Jesus had his own Galilean Transformation that he experienced when he came from beyond the space-time continuum to be born in human flesh and grow up in the region of Galilee. We’ve read the passages pertaining to his birth this evening (Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 2:1-12). They introduce us to this Galilean Transformation. But there are so many others that speak to this Galilean Transformation from 2,000 years ago. For instance:

In John 1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14).

In Galatians 4: **“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...” (Galatians 4:4).**

In Philippians 2: **“He made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7).**

The Biblical emphasis in regards to Jesus’ transformation isn’t so much on the Galilean part of the phrase...but on the Transformation part, because it’s that “transformation part” that matters. His transformation is why Christmas matters. It’s why Jesus’ life matters. It’s why his death matters. It’s why his Resurrection matters. **Jesus was transformed across the space-time continuum from the heavenly realm to the earthly realm.** From a spiritual being to flesh and blood being. From a timeless, eternal place to a temporal one. From an all-powerful position of creation to a helpless baby created in his mother’s womb. From Divinity to Humanity. And all of that brought a lot of wonder into the lives of people who were there then, and since.

We read about people like Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, about the wise guys...who were all in a state of wonder at his birth. And throughout his life people are in a state of wonder: from crowds who wondered at the miracles...to the people who wondered at his teachings...to His resurrection that leaves them in wonder.

But here’s the thing: much as Russell Wilson’s lateral to Mike Davis looks like it’s going both backward and forward at the same time: **The birth and the life of Jesus show us two divergent and conflicting things.** We see his humanity *but we also* see his divinity. On the surface, His birth looks like any other. He’s physically born the way other babies are. He looks like any other baby. He grows up and looks like a man like any other man. He gets hungry, he gets thirsty. He has relationships with a wide variety of people. He’s liked by some people and disliked by others. So there’s so much about Jesus that looks like a very natural, normal, human.

But then there’s all this other stuff that doesn’t look at all like anyone else’s life: Angels announcing the birth; dozens and dozens of prophecies that against astronomical odds are all fulfilled in him; four biographers who

record many of the significant events of his life; miracles that he does of feeding, of healing, people being raised from the dead; proclamations by people that he is the Messiah...and then His own miraculous resurrection that brings incredible wonder and confirms that His life was not just a normal human life. Jesus was not just a normal man. Just as a Galilean Transformation in the scientific sense is a way of explaining multiple forces upon an object as it moves through space and time: **Jesus had his own “legit Galilean Transformation” from beyond space as the two forces of Divinity and humanity merge together: And that is what we celebrate with great wonder at Christmas.**

That’s why we’re here tonight – because of the wonder of Christmas. That’s why we gather every Sunday. That’s why we pray. That’s why we read our Bibles. That’s why we serve the community around us in His name. We have kept a sense of wonder at the Galilean Transformation that took place in Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago. And: **If you have lost that sense of wonder and amazement at Jesus, or if you’ve never had that sense of wonder...God is seeking to stir it up in you this Christmas** (He does at other times, too, of course), **to lead you into (re)discovering the wonder of Jesus.** Christmas is the annual opportunity to once again be *in wonder* at this Galilean Transformation that transcends space and time.

By the way, there’s more to Joanna’s story about her lost Bible and note from her dad, and I’d like to close with it. “A few years passed, and Chip [whom she married later] and I were at a local breakfast joint when a man who had attended my church when I was younger sat at the table next to us. He and his wife had moved away [from Texas] to pastor a church on Boston. We were briefly catching up when he asked, ‘This may be an awkward question, but what does your dad call you?’

‘Jojo,’ I said, without a pause.

He leaned back and smiled. ‘You’re not going to believe this,’ he said. He had been mentoring a man [in Boston] who was using a Bible embossed with the name “Joanna Stevens” [her maiden name]. The man had found the Bible at the doughnut shop where he worked and had been using it ever since. He

even said he was particularly touched by the handwritten note this father had written to his daughter. I can remember feeling shocked. I had long since given up on getting my Bible back.

But I also remember it feeling right—as if this had been the plan all along. The Bible had served me so well during my season in New York, and now it was fulfilling a purpose with this man, too. For me, the wonder was that I had been let in on the plan. I was getting the blueprint of the larger picture. Sometimes there is wonder in mystery; other times it's in understanding.

My pastor friend ended up mailing my Bible back to me. It's now in the bag I carry to work every day. The fact that my dad's letter, left behind hundreds of miles away, found its way back to me continues to leave me awestruck. I choose not to question [the turn of events] or analyze it. I don't strip the wonder of its impact. I have chosen to simply receive it and be amazed.

“Whenever wonder comes knocking, I want to choose to not be inconvenienced but rather to always let it in. Who knows? Maybe it will find a hospitable resting place and stay for a while.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I hope and pray that the wonder of Christmas...the wonder of Jesus' Galilean Transformation, the wonder of Jesus' birth, his life, his ministry, his death, his resurrection, would come knocking on your door...That even right here and now, God would be opening your eyes to the wonder of Jesus. Maybe you've never experienced a sense of wonder in regards to Jesus...or maybe that wonder was once there, but it's been left behind somewhere and thought to be long lost. Or maybe it's still there and the Christmas event is a reminder of the wonder you have. Regardless, I pray that the wonder of Jesus would “find a hospitable resting place” in you, “stay for a while,” and bring about your own transformation. Let's pray...Amen.

ⁱ “When Wonder Comes Knocking” by Joanna Gaines, in *The Magnolia Journal*, p. 33, Winter 2017.

ⁱⁱ I'm not curious enough to wonder about these things on my own. Help came from:

http://www.tensionnot.com/jokes/one_liner_jokes/did_you_ever_wonder

ⁱⁱⁱ “When Wonder Comes Knocking” by Joanna Gaines, in *The Magnolia Journal*, p. 33, Winter 2017.