

The Difference Between Looking and Seeing

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What is your favorite Christmas movie?

It's a Wonderful Life?



Some version of *A Christmas Carol*?



Of course there's little Ralphie Parker in *A Christmas Story*, who wants nothing more in life than a Red Ryder Ranger Model Air Rifle. Is that your favorite?



My friend Tom loves telling everyone that *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie.

I'm not going to waste your time explaining why. If you want to argue with him about it on social media I can connect you.



Instead I want to mention another movie that is coming out this month that is a true Christmas movie that doesn't look like a Christmas movie. Of course I mean *Matrix Resurrections*.



I'm sure we all remember the character Neo played by Keanu Reeves from the first Matrix films.

In the first film we meet Neo, the most ordinary of people. Few would believe he is *The One*.

Neo doesn't even believe it himself. But he becomes the reluctant hero destined to free humanity from the machines who have enslaved it in a virtual reality.

The Christmas story is about the fulfillment of prophecy, the revealing of the Messiah, and the liberation of the world. It is a story that resonates so deeply in us that Hollywood just keeps giving it to us in new forms. Except with more explosions.

We heard one version of the story last week - John the baptizer's ministry as described by

Mark. This we are hearing about according to John's gospel. That is, we are reading Jesus' disciple John telling us about Jesus' cousin John. In John's gospel, the Baptizer get challenged by the Pharisees about his ministry. "Who are you to be out here baptizing Jewish people?" they ask. If anyone was going to do something like that, they would need to be the promised Messiah, or Elijah returned, or the prophet we have heard would appear and do all the miracles done at the time of the Exodus. Yet John emphatically tells them he is none of those people. John says something very similar to what we heard him say in Mark's gospel: "I baptize you with water, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." He's talking about the Messiah, but at this point even he doesn't know who it that is. The baptizer in anchored in deep humility. He knows who he is and who he isn't. He is doing what God has called him to do, even if he doesn't have all the answers. John accepts that the Messiah's identity is on a "need to know" basis and he doesn't need to know! At least not yet. Would that we could trust and obey like that too!

But the day after the Pharisee leave, John baptizes his cousin Jesus. That is when he learns the truth. John declares to those around him, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" He then explains,

I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God." John 1:32-33 NRSV

Then we come to the moment when John redirects two of his disciples from himself and toward Jesus:

³⁵ The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶ and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" ³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹ He said to them, "Come and see."

I'd like you to imagine being one of those disciples, and imagine seeing and hearing John. And then imagine turning to see Jesus. What do you think these first disciples saw and thought as John points and says: Here is the Lamb of God! He is The One! Do you think they first looked at each other and said, "Him? He doesn't look very Lamb-of-God-ish. I don't see anything special." Do you think they paused and looked back at John with a look that said, "Are you sure?" Maybe that was why they hung back. Maybe they had doubts, or maybe they were hoping to see a sign like John had seen.

Now that you have imagined that, I wonder how many of you saw this?

The Lamb of God, Agnus Dei
Francisco de Zurbaran

https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FLamb_of_God&psig=AOvVaw1FeNHK9K3oAYE9WFs-Zok4&ust=1637300684611000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAgQjRxqFwoTCLidL-aofQCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD



You may rightly ask: What I am looking at?

This is a portrait of Jesus Christ. It may not be the one we are most accustomed to, but it is. In fact it embodies the ministry and mission of Jesus that John the Baptizer was trying to convey when he said, “Behold the lamb of God!” This is a portrait of who Jesus Christ is, which is *really different* from what Jesus of Nazareth looked like.

This painting is Francisco de Zurbaran’s *Agnus Dei, The Lamb of God* c. 1635–1640. Let’s spend some time with this image while we recall that John the gospel writer is also John the *Revealer*. Trying to help people know who Jesus Christ is held John’s imagination for the whole of his life. It was everything to him. In Revelation 5, John offers two images of Christ. He is depicted as the Lion of Judah who has conquered, then as a Lamb with seven horns. This lionish lamb, John says, is the only one who has won the right to open the scroll that represents God’s covenant. The two portrayals of Christ are meant to be held together. The seven horns signify immense strength—the Lamb is a powerful *Ram!* But he must be presented as Lamb, for “he stands as one that has been slaughtered.”

Jesus Christ is the mighty sacrifice. He is the vulnerable conqueror. He is the Giver and the gift. He is the prototype and the pattern upon which all life and all shalom is created and sustained.

We may find ourselves looking at Jesus. A lot. But We can't see Jesus Christ this way without help. John the Baptist helped. John the beloved disciple helped. Even Francisco de Zurbaran and the countless other artists and theologians and pastors and composers and storytellers and sculptors have helped.

But in the end, the one who helps us most of all is Jesus himself.

He turns to the two of John's disciples who are tailing him and he asks, "What are you looking for?"

Jesus helps by first asking us a question. We won't ever know what we are looking at unless we know what we are looking for.

What are YOU looking for this morning? If Jesus asked you this question, what would you say?

Jesus, I'm looking for a solution to my problems.

Jesus, I'm looking for a purpose to my life.

Jesus, I'm looking for a way out of the mess I've made.

Jesus, I'm looking for some relief, some peace, some healing.

Jesus, I don't actually know what I am looking for but other people I know keep saying that you are the answer. Are you?

Are you the Lamb of God? Are you The One?

And to anyone who asks this question, Jesus gives the very same answer.

Come and see.

Let us pray.