

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

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NBA I/3; BC A13

2. Day of Christmas (BWV 40, 121, 57, 248-II)

*Tit. 3:4-7 (The mercy of God appeared in Christ)

*Lk. 2:15-20 (The shepherds go to the manger)

This day also celebrated as the festival of St. Stephen the Martyr:

Acts 6:8-7:2 & 7:51-59 (The stoning of Stephen)

Mt. 23:34-39 (Jesus' lament: Jerusalem kills the prophets sent to her)

Librettist: Unknown

FP: 26 December 1724 (St. Thomas

in the morning & St. Thomas at afternoon Vespers.

Form: Chorale/fantasia - Aria (T) - Recit (A) - Aria (B) - Recit (S) - Chorale. The underlying chorale is Luther's 1524 German translation of a Latin hymn by the 5th-century writer Coelius Sedulius. The libretto is typical of Bach's Leipzig chorale cantatas in that it retains the first and last stanza verbatim and paraphrases the inner stanzas with 2 aria-recitative pairs. Unlike Cantatas 40 and 57, the libretto addresses the readings of the 2nd day of Christmas rather than those of St. Stephen's Day (also celebrated on 26 December). While the outer movements are exhortations to praise God in archaic musical style, the inner pairs of movements expound the unfathomable wonder of the Incarnation and the response at Jesus' manger, respectively. The arias are in a distinctly light, modern style, perhaps to indicate the childlike faith required as response to the wonder of the Incarnation, as referenced in no. 2. See note for more.

Christum wir sollen loben schon

For a list of Bach cantatas based on a Latin hymn, or on a psalm or canticle, see side note.



Coelius Sedulius's alphabetical hymn "A solis ortus cardine"

Soprano.

Instrumentation:
Oboe d'amore
Cornett
Tbn I, II, III
Vln I, II
Vla
SATB
Continuo

Alto.

Tenore.

The first movement contrasts greatly with the modern-sounding fantasias written for the days before and after (BWV 91 on Dec. 25, 1724 and BWV 133 on Dec. 27).

Basso.

The running 8th notes in the continuo (later associated with "loben" (praising) are derived from the chorale line's opening; in a sense, they "reinterpret" the line. Later, they furnish the material for the "unthematic" sections of the accompanying voices, even for later chorale phrases, and thus provide unity, while reminding one of the opening chorale line.

(Coro.) (Moderato $\text{♩} = 66$) (Chorale Verse 1)

•Christ's birth: Praise Son of Mary to the ends of the earth! (121/1).

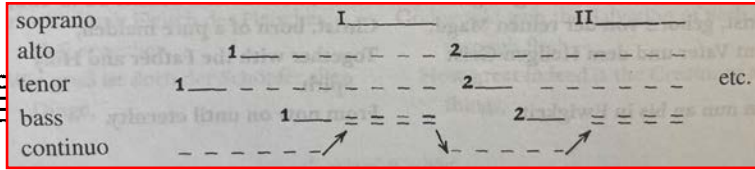
In keeping with the 5th-century origin of the underlying hymn, the opening movement is in archaic motet style, each line of the chorale prepared by the lower three voices in imitation (with doubling instruments), before being presented in longer note values by the soprano. At that point the lower voices accompany with imitative but unthematic material and the continuo (which has been independent before) joins the vocal bass, so that the texture never exceeds 4 parts. Alla breve meter and the use of cornett and trombones as doubling instruments underscore the movement's archaic character.

Chorale Line 1 (T-A-B-S).
Christum wir sollen loben schon, wir sollen
Christe Jesus praise we ev'ry one, we praise Him

Two sharps suggests F# Phrygian. Eric Chafe notes that medieval hymn begins in Dorian and ends in Phrygian and that Bach's harmonization mirrors this harmonic progression. As for cantata's overall tonal design, Chafe views it as a "descent-ascent tonal dynamic that mirrors the meaning of [the] work on several levels." See *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 140-141, 148-149.

Moderato.

E minor B minor B minor



The runs of 8th notes are related to the continuo bass at the beginning.

stum wir sol - len lo - ben schon, wir sollen lo -
 Je - sus praise we ev' - ry one, we praise him ev' -
 lo - ben schon, lo -
 ev' - ry - one, ev' -

The language of the first line is derived from Psalm 147:1: Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for he is gracious, and a song of praise is seemly (Luther 1545: solch Lob ist lieblich und schön).

B minor D major F#(7) B minor D major

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11

ben schon, wir sol len lo
ry - one, we praise Him ev'.

Chri - stum wir sol len lo ben
Christ Je - sus praise we ev - ry

B7 E minor G major

16

Chri - stum wir sol - - - - -
Christ Je - - - - - sus praise - - - - -

ben schon, lo - - - - - ben schon, lo - - - - - ben
ry - one, ev' - - - - - ry - one, ev' - - - - - ry -

ben schon, wir sol - - - - - len lo - - - - - ben
ry - one, we praise - - - - - Him ev' - - - - - ry

schon, wir sollen lo - - - - - ben
one, we praise Him ev' - - - - - ry -

E minor E minor D7

Last note of the chorale phrase is held as a pedal.

21

len lo - ben schon,
we ev' - ry one,

schon, wir sol - len lo - ben, Chri - stum wir sollen
one, Christ Je - sus praise we, Christ Je - sus praise we

schon, lo
one, ev' -

schon, wir sol - len lo - ben, wir sollen lo - ben, wir sollen lo
one, Christ Je - sus praise we, we praise Him ev' -

G major E minor B7 E minor E minor F#7

26

lo - ben schon, der rei - nen
ev' - ry - one, the Vir - gin

ben schon, der rei -
ry - one, the Vir -

ben schon,
ry - one,

B minor B minor D7 E minor N6

A

Chorale Line 2 (A-T-B-S).

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31

Magd Ma - ri - en Sohn, der reinen Magd
 Maid - en Ma - ry's son, the Vir - gin Maid

. nen Magd Ma - ri - en Sohn, der rei . nen Magd
 gin Maid - en Ma - ry's son, the Vir - gin Maid

der rei - - - - nen
 the Vir - - - - gin

C major G major A7 D major D major D major

36

der rei - - - - nen
 the Vir - - - - gin

Ma - ri - - - - en Sohn, der rei . nen Magd'
 - en Ma - - - - ry's son, the Vir - gin Maid

Ma - ri - en Sohn, Ma - ri - en Sohn, der rei . nen
 - - - - - en Ma - ry's son, the Vir - gin's son, the Vir - gin

Magd Ma - ri - en Sohn, der rei . nen Magd
 Maid - en Ma - ry's son, the Vir - gin Maid

E7 A major D major A major 4 A7 D major D major D7

41.

Magd Ma - ri - en Sohn,
Maid - - en Ma - - ry's son,

Ma - ri - - en Sohn,
en Ma - - ry's son,

Magd, der reinen Magd Ma - ri - en
Maid, the Vir - gin Maid, the Vir - gin's

Ma - ri - en Sohn, der rei - nen Magd
- en Ma - ry's son, the Vir - gin Maid - - - - -

G major A7 D major D major D7

46

Ma - ri - - en Sohn,
the Vir - - gin's son,

Sohn, so weit die
son, as far as

Ma - ri - en Sohn, so weit
- en Ma - ry's son, as far

G major D major D major

B

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51

lie - be Son - ne leucht't,
 rays of sun ex - tend,
 die lie - be Son - ne
 as rays of sun ex -

G major D major D major D7 A minor B major B7

56

Text painting: Long melismas to depict praise reaching "like the rays of the sun, to the ends of the earth," as referenced in the text.

weit / far / die lie - be Son - ne / as rays of sun / leucht't, / tend, / so weit / as / die lie - be Son - ne / as rays of sun ex -

E minor A7 D major D major

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60

so weit
as far

ne leucht't. so weit die
ex - tend, as far as

ne
ex -

leucht't, so weit die lie - be Son - ne leucht't,
tend, as far as rays of sun ex - tend,

D major D major (F#7)

64

die lie - be Son -
as rays of sun

lie - be Son - ne leucht't,
rays of sun ex - tend,

leucht't, die lie - be Son - ne leucht't, so weit die lie - be Son - ne
tend, as rays of sun ex - tend, as far as rays of sun ex -

B minor D major F#7

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78

Chorale Line 4 (A-T-B-S).

leucht't und an al ler Welt
- tend and through all the earth

und an al ler
and through all the

- tend,

E minor G major G major (D7) G major

83.

En de reicht, an al -
to the end, through all

Welt En de reicht, an al ler Welt En de
earth to the end, through all the earth to the

und an - ler
and through all the

D7 E7 A major A7 (B7) E minor B minor D7 A minor B7 E minor

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83



und an
and through

ler Welt En - de reicht, und an
the earth to the end, and through

reicht, und an al - ler Welt, an
end, and through all the earth, through

Welt En - de reicht, und an al -
earth to the end, and through all

E minor F#7 B minor (B major)

93



al - ler
all the

al - ler Welt En - de reicht, und an
all the earth to the end, and through

al - ler Welt En - de reicht, und an al - ler Welt
all the earth to the end, through all the earth

lei Welt En - de reicht
the earth to the end

E minor A7 B minor D major A minor E minor

Last note of the chorale phrase is held as a very long pedal, presumably symbolizing praise reaching the ends of the earth, as referenced in the text.

98

Welt En de reicht.
 earth to the end.

al ler Welt En de reicht, an al ler Welt
 all the earth to the end, through all the earth

En de reicht, an al ler Welt
 to the end, through all

D major A7 D major D major B minor B minor

103

En de reicht.
 to the end.

ler Welt En de reicht.
 the earth to the end.

B minor B minor

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108

B minor B minor F# major

Alfred Dürr writes, "The second movement begins the 'modern' part of the cantata. Noteworthy here is the irregular periodic structure of the opening ritornello (3 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 2 bars) and its cadence in the relative major, D. In order to reach a conclusion in the home key of B minor, it has to be substantially modified when repeated at the end of the main section. This tendency towards the remodeling of thematic material is also noticeable elsewhere in the aria. It leads to a happy avoidance of the stereotype of pure da capo form and lends the movement an unconventional character." See Alfred Dürr, "The Cantatas of J. S. Bach," translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 113.

Aria.

121/2. (Tempo giusto ♩ = 72.)
1. Ob. d'amore

(Based on Chorale Verse 2)

• Incarnation: Creator exalts us by becoming flesh (121/2).

Oboe d'amore is in dialogue with the tenor, supported by continuo. The rest here is editorial realization.

Ritornello foreshadows singer's material, text lines mm. 1-3.

B minor
Phrase structure is unusual: 3+3+2+2+2.

D major D major

D major E(7) A major A7 D major

The syncopations at the beginning of lines of the normally weak syllable in "begreifere" is similar to unusual accents in movement 4, where they are used to describe John the Baptist jumping in his mother's womb at the recognition of Jesus in Mary's womb. For Albert Schweitzer's objections, see side note.

The exaltation of human beings referenced in the text alludes to Psalm 8 (see note). The mood is playful, suggesting simple wonder at the babe in the manger, as referenced in the text.

Tenore. Lines 1-3.

It is noteworthy that the singer's tessitura is high (sometimes the notes are higher than those of the oboe d'amore), a fact that appears to be related to the text's emphasis on God's lofty position and his exaltation of human beings.

O du von Gott erhöhte Kreatur,
 Thou man whom God created can-not
 O thou by God exalted creature,

D major B minor B minor

A descending octave scale at the end of the ritornello, appears to represent the central concept of the Incarnation, as referenced in the text.

tur, know
 be-greif nicht, nein, nein, be-wund're
 nor un-comprehend-der-stand, but on-ly won-der

D major D major

Editorial additions are greyed out to make the oboe d'amore line more visible.

Text painting: Melisma with cross figures for the word "erwerben" (purchase [of humankind's salvation]).

nur: show, only
 Gott will durch Fleisch des Fleisches Heiler wer-
 that he through man can com-pass man's sal-va-

God would by flesh flesh's salvation purchase,

D major E7

ben, des Fleisches Heiler wer-ben;
 tion, can com-pass man's sal-va-tion;

Ritornello mf

A major D major D major D7

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26

G major E7 A major A7 D major D major D7 G major A7 D major

30 Lines 1-3.

o du von Gott er.höhte Krea - tur, be.grei - - fe
 Thou man whom God cre - a - ted can-not know nor un - - der -

D major B7 E minor F#7 B minor

34

nicht,nein,nein,be - wund're nur, be - grei - - fe -
 stand, but on - ly won - der_ show, not un - - der -

B minor B minor

Word painting: Melisma treated sequentially for "begreife" (grasp/comprehend).

37

nicht, be - grei - - fe nicht,nein,nein,bewund're nur:
 - stand, not un - - - - - der-stand, but on - ly wond-er show:

B minor B7 E minor E minor A major

Text painting: Melisma with cross figures for the word "erwerben" (purchase [of humankind's salvation]).

41

Gott will durch Fleisch des Fleisches Heil er - wer -
 that he through man can com - pass man's sal - va -

D major B7 E minor E major F#(7)

44

- ben, des Fleisches Heil er - wer - ben.
 - tion, can com - pass man's sal - va - tion.

B minor B major B7 E minor B minor B minor

47

50

The syncopated leap up reverses the direction of the opening interval of the first 3 lines. The opposing directions correspond to the contrast between a lofty God and his lowly (yet exalted) creatures, as referenced in the text.

Lines 4-6.

Wie gross ist doch der
 He, who from cha - os
 How great is indeed the

B minor B minor D major

A pedal...
 Phrase structure: 3+3.

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53

Schöp - fer al - ler Din - ge, und wie bist du ver -
 hath the world e - rec - ted, al - though Thou be - des -
 Creator of all things, and how art thou despised

A7 D major A(7) F#7

Word painting: Melisma for "retten" (save/rescue).

56

ach - tet und ge - rin - ge, um dich da - durch zu ret - -
 - pised and once re - jec - ted, thee, too, in - deed can res - -
 and lowly, thee thereby to rescue

B minor C#7 F# minor D major E7

B pedal...

59

- ten vom Ver - der - ben.
 - cue from dam - na - tion.
 from perdition.

A major F# minor F# minor E7

Ritornello mf

62

A major F# minor F# minor

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Lines 4-6.

65

Wie gross ist doch der Schöpfer aller Dinge, und wie bist du verachtet und geirrt, um dich dadurch zu retten.

He, who from chaos hath the world erected, al-though Thou be despised and once re-jected, thee, too, in-deed can rescue thee from damnation, thee, too, can rescue thee, too, can rescue thee, too, in-deed can

F# minor B7 E minor

69

Chromaticism for "verachtet" (despised).

Word painting: Melisma for "retten" (save/rescue).

ten vom Verderben, um dich zu retten.

cue from damnation, thee, too, can rescue thee, too, can rescue thee, too, can rescue thee, too, can

D# dim.7 E minor B7 E minor C major G major

73

Tortured harmonic writing for "thereby to rescue thee from perdition"...

um dich dadurch zu retten.

thee, too, in-deed can rescue thee, too, in-deed can

(B7) E minor E minor A minor

76

Word painting: Melismas with dramatic leaps for "retten" (save/rescue).

um dich dadurch zu retten.

thee, too, in-deed can rescue thee, too, in-deed can

D major D7 E minor D7

79

ret - ten vom Ver - der - ben.
res - cue from dam - na - tion.

Ob. d'amore tacet.

G major G7 C major E minor (D7) G major

Da Capo.

Martin Petzoldt notes that Bach often uses the alto voice to represent faith, the church, or the Holy Spirit. See, for examples, Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar*, vol. 1, p. 541, 694; vol. 2, p. 824; vol. 3, pp. 101, 143.

Secco
121/3. **Recitativo.**

(Based on Chorale Verses 3 & 4.)
● Incarnation: Incomprehensible mystery of grace (121/3).

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 10 mm.

1. **Alto.** A D C# F# B E

Der Gna - de un - er - mess - lich We - sen hat sich den Himmel
The Grace of God is all un - bound - ed, nor does it keep it -
Original: unermesslichs

D major E major

3

nicht zur Wohnstatt auserlesen, weil keine Grenze sie umschliesst. **Was Wunder,**
- self by Hea - ven's walls surrounded, we see and find it ev' - ry - where. What wond - er,
Sudden chord shift for "what wonder."

F#7 B minor E7 A major A major C# major

The text alludes to passages such as 1 Kings 8:27 (King Solomon at the dedication of the temple): Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! (Also 2 Chronicles 2:6, 6:18, Isaiah 66:1, Acts 7:48-49, 17:24.)

The reference to grace being poured into a pure heart alludes to biblical passages such as the Epistle of the day, Titus 3:4-6: But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us...in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Also Romans 5:5: God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. This movement and the following aria suggest that recognition of the Incarnation is beyond reason and is possible only by a movement of the Holy Spirit.

6

E# **D#** **B#**

dass **allhier** Verstand und Witz gebricht? ein solch Geheimnis zu ergründen, wenn sie sich in ein
that at this our un - der - stand - ing fails, when we at - tempt to solve the sec - ret, to fath - om which a

Original: allhie

C#7 F# minor D# dim. G#7 C# minor

The concept of the Incarnation (i.e., God choosing a pure body as his temple) is generalized to include all believers, alluding to passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:16. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (Also 1 Corinthians 6:19.)

In the original Latin hymn, this passage forms the central stanza of the 7-stanza section dealing with Christ's birth, acting as a bridge between the theological doctrine of the Incarnation (Latin hymn, stanzas 2-3) to the historical events (Latin hymn, stanzas 5-6). See note at no. 1.

Domus pudici pectoris
 templum repente fit dei;
 intacta nesciens virum
 verbo concepit filium.

The domicile of the chaste breast
 becomes a shrine where God shall rest:
 untouched by man
 conceived by word the Son.

A#

keusches Herz er_giesst.
pure hear may not dare.

Gott wäh_let sich den reinen Leib zu einem Tempel seiner
God chooses-for himself the pure body as a temple of his
God gives to us to keep for Him our bo-dies as a sanc-tu -

F# minor 7 G# major C# minor F#7 B major B7

Text painting: The bold harmonic turn to C major expresses the amazing manner in which God turned to humans in the Incarnation.

In the cantata movement's sequence of keys, C major is central: 1. Em-F#m, 2. Bm, 3. DM-CM, 4. CM, 5. GM-Bm, 6. Em-F#m. In the libretto, this passage represents the turn from theological aspects of the Christmas story to historical ones. For the significance of C, see side note. Martin Petzoldt argues that this passage marks a thematic turn in the libretto with respect to the relationship between God and human beings. Whereas humans could only stand in awe of God before (movement no. 2), they can now become children of God through faith because God became human. See *Bach Kommentar* 2:161.



12

praise, so as to humankind himself in marvelous manner to turn.

Ehren, um zu den Menschen sich mit wunder_voller Art zu keh_ren.
- a - ry, in which we may pre - serve and ev - er keep a - live his glo - ry.

C# major C#7 E# dim.7 C major C major

"Bach...illustrated the closing words, 'So that He may turn to mankind in a wondrous manner', with an exceedingly bold and surprising harmonic twist: a sixth-chord of C# major is followed not by the expected F# minor but by an abrupt turn, via a diminished seventh, to C major. In Bach's instrumental works we hardly find unprepared progressions of this kind. Here it is justified by the text, which speaks of the 'wonder' of the Birth of Jesus." Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 113.

Movement 4 begins the cantata. Written in the first person, it focuses on the incarnation. Eric Chafe suggests that the opening melodic gestures in contrary motion "foretell the outcome of the cantata, the elevation of humankind to God's children." See *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 145.

Da capo **Aria.** (Based on Chorale Verse 5) •Response at manger: Recognizing Messiah through the power of the Holy Spirit, as John did in the womb; also Simeon in the temple and the shepherds at the manger (121/4). See side note for the biblical accounts being referenced.

121/4. (Moderato ♩ = so.)

Form (Rhyme: ABCCA)
 Ritornello (mm. 1-19) CM
 A. Lines 1-2 (2x) (19-27) CM-GM
 Rit. (27-35) GM
 Lines 1-2 (2x) (35-53) GM-CM
 Rit. (53-71) CM [Fine]
 B. Lines 3-5 (2x) (71-81) Am
 Rit. (81-85) Am-BM
 Lines 3-5 (85-90) BM-Em
 Rit. (90-93) Em
 Lines 3-5 (2x) (93-106) Em-GM
 da capo

Ritornello derived from vocal line, in binary form.

Use of figura corta suggests joy (see side note).

C major
For the significance of C, see note above.

Vin I
Via
V. II
tr
mf
Continuo

Note: 3/4 of the aria is devoted to the first 2 lines (the A section).

For Alfred Dürr's comments, see side note.

C major

Concerto-like writing with close imitation among the string instruments and specified dynamic contrasts. Eric Chafe writes, "In striking contrast to the archaic dimension of the two chorale settings, the two arias...are modern in style, especially the second, whose ritornello features a periodic phrase construction with piano/forte echo devices, sequential features, and a tonal design that modulates to the dominant at the midpoint and returns to the tonic over the second half." See *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 142. These features, along with patter diction, suggest galant style.

C major
D7
G major

G major

G major
G7
C major
C7
F major

Syncopation in parallel thirds (compare mm. 46, 82-83, 91-92).

G7
G pedal (this pedal figure is later associated with the steadfast "arm of faith" (see mm. 71-74)).

11 12 13 14

G7 (A7) D minor G(7) C major

15 16

Syncopation

17 18

tr Syncopation tr

G7 C major C major C7 F major C major G7

19 **Basso.**

Text painting: John the Baptist's joyful leap in his mother's womb is depicted with rising figure and figura corta. Note: 4/5 of the aria is devoted to the first 2 lines of text.

Jo - han - - nis freu - - den - vol - les Sprin -
 Then John, _____ in joy - - ful wel - come spring -

20 21

p C major

gen, Jo - han - - nis freu - - den - vol - les Sprin -
 - ing, then John, _____ in joy - - ful wel - come spring -

22 23

pp C major

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23

gen - er - kann - te dich, mein Je - su,
- ing, know well that Thou, the Lord, had

mf

p

C major G major D major G major D(7)

25

schon, Jo - han - nis freu - den - vol - les Springen er - kann - te dich, mein Je - su,
come. Then John, in joy - ful wel - come spring - ing, knew well that Thou, the Lord has -

mf

tr

Patter diction suggests the galant style.

G major

27

schon,
come.

Ritornello

mf

tr

G major

29

p

mf

tr

G major G major

31II

mf

G major

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34

Jo-han-nis freu-nis
Then John, in-joy

G major G7 C major

Text painting: Strings play the leaping material, while singer sustains a note, then sings a long melisma for "joyful leaping," which is perhaps also indicative of the Holy Spirit's role in John and his mother's recognition of Jesus, as referenced in the biblical allusion (see above for biblical passage). See Martin Petzoldt, Bach Kommentar 2:166-167.

36||

37.

C major

39

D(7) G major E(7)

41

A minor (G7) C major

den-vol-les Sprin-gen, Jo-han-nis
ful-wel-come spring-ing, then John, in

43

freu - - den - vol - les Sprin - gen er - kann - - te
 joy - - ful wel - come spring - ing, knew well - - - that

C major
 Syncopation in parallel thirds (compare mm. 11-12, 82-83, 91-92). C7

45

dich, mein Je - - su, schon, er - kann - - te dich, mein Je - su,
 Thou, the Lord, - - - had come, knew well - - - that Thou, the - Lord had

F major G7 C major

47

schon, Jo - han - - nis freu - den - vol - - les Sprin - gen er -
 come then John, - - - in joy - ful wel - - come spring - ing, knew

G7 C major

50

kann - - - te dich, mein Je - su, schon, er -
 well - - - that Thou, the Lord, had - come, knew

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52

kann-te dich, mein Je - su, — schon.
well that Thou, the Lord — had — come.

Ritornello

mf

C major

54II

C major

57

C major

D7

G major

59

G major

61

G major

G7 C major

C7

F major

Syncopation

G7 C major

63II

G7

66

Syncopation

C major

68

Syncopation

C major

70 II

Text painting: Sweet parallel 6ths between singer and Vln I to depict holding Jesus (as Simeon did).

Nun da ein Glau - - - - - bens_arm - - - - - dich
And as his faith - - - - - so moved - - - - - him

C major

C major

A minor

E pedal suggests that the "arm of faith" is steadfast...

A minor

73

hält, so will mein Her - - - - - ze von - - - - - der Welt zu
then, my heart would leap - - - - - to Him - - - - - a - gain and

C major

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

75II

dei_ner Krippe brün - stig drin - gen; nun da ein Glau_bens - arm
 has-ten to his cra - dle sing - ing; and as his faith so moved

A minor A7 D minor G7

78

dich hält, so_willmein Her - ze von - der Welt zu
 ly - ing, my_heart would leap to Him a - gain and

C major E(7) A minor

80II

dei_ner Krip - pe brünstig drin - gen;
 has-ten to His cra - dle sing - ing;

mf

A minor A7 D(7) E(7)

Syncope (compare mm. 11–12, 46, 91–92). Here it suggests the shepherds' uncoordinated haste to reach the manger, as referenced in the text.

83

nun
and

p

A minor B major

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

85II

da ein Glau - - - bens arm dich hält, so will mein Her - -
 as his faith so moved him then, my heart would leap

E minor B7 E minor E minor
 B pedal...

88

- - ze von der Welt zu dei,ner Krippe brün - - stig
 to Him a - gain and has - ten to His cra - - dle

E minor

90II

drin - gen;
 sing - ing;

Syncopation in parallel thirds (compare mm. 11-12, 46, 82-83).

E minor

Figura corta

93

nun da ein Glaubens arm dich hält, so
 and as his faith so moved him then, my

E minor E7 A minor D major D7

A long, sequential melisma in which the singer stresses off-beats against the first violin's down-beats for the word "world" suggests a "left-right" progression from the world (and, presumably, worldly pursuits) to the manger, as referenced in the text.

95

will mein Her. ze von der Welt
heart would leap to Him a gain

G major

97

zu dei. ner Krip.
and has- ten to

G major

99

- pe brün: stig drin - gen; nun da ein Glau - bens -
His cra - dle sing - ing; and as his faith so

G major

D pedal...

101

arm - dich - hält, so will - mein - Her - ze
moved - him - then, my heart - would - leap - to

"Welt" (world) is colored with a dim. 7 marking, suggesting that it is something to be avoided—as suggested in biblical passages such as 1 John 2:15: Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. (Also James 4:4.) Yet the musical style is galant, i.e., "worldly."

103

von der Welt zu deiner Krippe brünstig dringen.
Him a-gain and has-ten to His cra-dle-sing-ing.

D# dim.7 G major G major

Da Capo.

The text of the recitative references the Gospel reading of the day, which recounts the shepherds' journey to the manger. It also alludes to Hebrews 13:15: ...Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Secco (Based on Chorale Verses 6 & 7)
121/5. **Recitativo.** •Response at manger: Wonder that Christ is so lowly (121/5).

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 12 mm.

1. Soprano.

Doch wie erblickt es dich in deiner Krippe? Es
Ah! but to see Thee lying in Thy cradle! My
Original: Krippen

D minor (for the significance of D minor, see side note). D7 G major

Martin Petzoldt suggests that the shepherds' surprised reaction is depicted with the singer's late entrance (an exclamation) on "doch" (yet), frequent pauses, and sighing figures. See *Bach Kommentar* 2:168.

3

seufzt mein Herz: mit bebender und fast geschlossener Lippe bringt es sein dankend Opfer
heart beats fast; with silent trembling lips I kneel before Thee in love and adoration

Text painting: Sighing figures for "my heart sighs."

B dim. E7 A minor

6

dar. Gott, der so unermesslich war, nimmt Knechtsgestalt und Armuth an. Und
there. God loved the world with love so great He chose a menial estate. And
God, who so unmeasurable was, assumes servant's form and poverty.

Text painting: Octave leap up for "boundless/unmeasurable" followed by descent via tritones to low D#.

A minor (B7) E minor

Biblical allusions include passages such as Philipians 2:7: [Christ] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and 2 Corinthians 8:9: You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

The final 2 lines of text ("So let, with the angel choirs, a jubilant song of praise and thanksgiving be heard") point to the closing chorale.

The final lines of text ("So let, with the angel choirs, a jubilant song of praise and thanksgiving be heard") allude to the day's Gospel reading (And [the shepherds] went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger...And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen) and point to the closing chorale.

(Verse 8: Luther added the German "Gloria Patri" to his translation of the first 7 stanzas of the Latin hymn. In its exhortation to praise God, it points back to the opening chorus, and alludes to the end of the Gospel reading.) •Response at manger: Worshipful doxology to Christ, along with Father and Holy Spirit, i.e., the Trinity.

Choral. (Mel.: „Christum wir sollen loben schon.“)

For Christmas, it is appropriate that Christ is mentioned first.

Soprano. 1.
+Cornetto
Ob d'amore
Vln I
Lob, Ehr'und Dank — sei dir ge - sagt, Christ, ge - bor'n von — der reinen
In thank-ful praise — sing ev' - ry - one to Christ the Vir - gin Ma - ry's

Alto.
+Tbn I
Vln II
Lob, Ehr'und Dank — sei dir ge - sagt, Christ, ge - bor'n von — der reinen
In thank-ful praise — sing ev' - ry one to Christ the — Vir - gin Ma - ry's

Tenore.
+Tbn II
Vla
Lob, Ehr'und Dank sei — dir ge - sagt, Christ, ge - bor'n von — der rei - nen
In thank-ful praise sing — ev' - ry one to Christ the Vir - gin Ma - ry's

Basso.
+Tbn III
Continuo
Organo
Lob, Ehr'und Dank — sei dir ge - sagt, Christ, ge - bor'n — von der rei - nen
In thank-ful praise — sing ev' - ry one to Christ the — Vir - gin Ma - ry's

Text painting:
Frequent ascending part-writing suggests praise to God.

The movement points back to the opening movement and alludes to the end of the Gospel reading: "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:20).

Magd, sammt Va - ter und dem heil' - gen Geist von nun an - bis in -
 son, with praise - a - dore the ho - ly three, from now through all e -

D major

iv6 V E minor
 Phrygian cadence E minor

in E - wig - keit.
 e - ter - ni - ty.

E - wig - keit
 ter - ni - ty.

E - wig - keit, in E - wig - keit.
 ter - ni - ty, e - ter - ni - ty.

E - wig - keit.
 e - ter - ni - ty.

Last note of the chorale phrase is extended, suggestive of the last word ("Ewigkeit"=eternity).

G major

F#7

B minor

D major

F# major