

J.S. Bach - Church

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NBA 1/2; BC A9a/b
Christmas Day (BWV 63, 91, 110, 248-I, 191)
*Titus 2:11-14 (The grace of God has appeared)
or: *Isaiah 9:2-7 (The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; unto us a child is born)
*Luke 2:1-14 (The birth of Christ, announcement to the shepherds, the praise of the angels)
Librettist: Unknown

FP: 25 December 1724—200 years after the year in which Luther wrote the underlying chorale (St. Thomas in the morning & St. Nicholas at afternoon Vespers)
Revived in 1731/32 and after 1735.

Festive Instrumentation:
Corno I, II
Timpani
Ob I, II, III
Vln I, II
Vla
SATB
Continuo, Fagotto, Organo

Movement 1 alludes to the praise of the angels at Jesus' birth, as recorded in the day's Gospel ("Gloria in excelsis").

1. (Coro) (Chorale Verse 1) • Incarnation: Praise to Christ for his human birth (91/1).

Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ

Rit. Motive a (in canon 7-fold (see note)) Ob I
Rit. Motive b.

Rit. Motive a (in canon 7-fold (see note)) Ob I
Rit. Motive b.

Ritornello (unrelated to the chorale but furnishes material for vocal motives).

The first movement is in concertante style with choirs of horns, oboes, strings, and voices interacting as equal bodies of sound. See Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 95. For the possible symbolic significance of the ritornello's motives, see note at m. 28.

G major

Vln II (up 8va)

Vla (up 8va)

Continuo

Corno I, II (up 8va)

Rit. Motive c ("circulatio": see note).

Figura corta (see side note).

G7

G major

Vln II (up 8va)

Continuo

Rit. Motive c ("circulatio": see note).

A minor

E7

Vln II (up 8va)

Continuo

D7

G major

Vln II (up 8va)

Continuo

Form: 1. Chorus/fantasia 2. Recit/Chorale (B) 3. Aria (T) 4. Recit/Arioso (B) 5. Duet (sop/alto) 6. Chorale V. 1 V. 2 (Vv. 3-4) (V. 5) (V. 6) V. 7
The cantata is part of Bach's second annual cycle in Leipzig (the chorale cantata cycle). It is based on the seven stanzas of the 1524 chorale by Martin Luther (1483-1546), at that time the principal hymn of the day. While the hymn has a symmetrical structure centered on the 4th stanza, Bach's cantata centers on 2 movements (nos. 3 & 4), which paraphrase stanzas 3 & 5. Framing this central complex are two movements in "dialogue" format: no. 2 is a text dialogue between recitative and chorale, no. 5 is a musical dialogue between soprano and alto. Nos. 2 & 3 are linked by instrumental references to the first chorale phrase; nos. 4 & 5 by chromaticism; nos. 1 & 5 by references to angels; nos. 2 & 6 by references to recognizing the love of God. (See Petzoldt, "Bach Kommentar" 2:100-101.)

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23 **B** Line 2 with ritornello motive b, chordal; with motive c, freely polyphonic.

dass du Mensch ge - bo - ren
 dass du Mensch ge - bo - ren, Mensch ge - bo -
 dass du Mensch ge - bo - ren
 dass du Mensch ge - bo - ren

26 G major

bist, Parallel motion in sweet 3rds.
 - ren, Mensch ge - bo - ren bist,
 - ren, Mensch ge - bo - ren bist,
 bist, ge - bo - ren bist,

Ritornello motive a, a sweeping theme initially associated with the word "gelobet" ("to praise," rendered in canon, referencing the "Gloria in excelsis" of the angels as recounted in the day's Gospel reading)
 Ritornello motive b (strings), a triadic theme descending step-wise that suggests the descent of the Son of God from paradise to earth
 Ritornello motive c (horns), a *circulatio* figure suggesting heaven's angels, as referenced in the text. See Martin Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:102.

Ritornello motive b.
 Ritornello motive c.

Ritornello motive a.

G major G7

29

C major C7 A7

31II

D minor G7

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45. Line 4 with ritornello motive a (now associated with the word "freuet" ["rejoice"]), imitative.

Ritornello motive a in the shape of a "figura circulatoria." Here the reference is to the rejoicing of angels, reflecting the Gospel reading. In movement 5 humans are added to the angel choir.

dess freu - et sich der
dess freu
dess freu

En - gel Schar.
et sich der En - gel Schar, der Engel
et sich der En - gel Schar, der Engel
et sich der En - gel

Schar.
Schar.
Schar.

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54 **E** Line 5 is intoned on the final tonic for 7 mm. in an extended IV-I cadence; accompanying voices freely polyphonic employing ritornello motive b.

Ky - ri - e

Ky - ri - e

Ky - ri - e

Ritornello motive b.

Ky - ri - e e - leis, Ky - ri -

56II **G7** C major C major

Chordal repetition of the text is reminiscent of the chordal codetta at the end of line 3.

e - leis!

e - leis, Ky - ri - e e - leis, Ky - ri - e e -

e - leis, Ky - ri - e e - leis, Ky - ri - e e -

e e - leis, Ky - ri - e e - leis, Ky - ri - e e -

Ob I Ritornello motive a. Ob II

59 C minor G major

Excursion to minor is probably occasioned by the text: "Lord have mercy."

leis!

leis!

leis!

Vln II (up 8va)

Ritornello

G major Vla (up 8va Continuo G7

62 A minor

64 G major

67 G major G major

Secco

2. Recitativo und Choral

(Verse 2 of the chorale, minus the closing "Kyrie," is inserted into a recitative.)
 • Incarnation: Eternal good clothed in flesh & blood (91/2).

Soprano

Text painting: Ascending line for "radiance of highest glory."

Der Glanz der höch-sten Herr-lich-keit, das E-ben-bild von Got-tes

Hybrid movement: a recitative is used to trope a chorale.

E minor Allusion to or paraphrase of Hebrews 1:3: "[Christ] reflects the glory of God (Luther 1545: der Glanz seiner Herrlichkeit) and bears the very stamp of his nature (Luther 1545: das Ebenbild seines Wesens), upholding the universe by his word of power..."

3 We-sen, hat in be-stimm-ter Zeit sich ei-nen Wohnplatz aus-er-

The Trinitarian understanding of the Incarnation is encapsulated in the Nicene Creed (see note).

D# dim.7

B7

#0
D# dim.7

5 Choral Recit.

lesen. Des ew'-gen Va-ters ei-nig Kind, das ew'-ge Licht von Licht ge-

Right hand is editorial realization. NBA; einigs

E minor G major G7 A minor A minor A7

See full score for the correct octave.

7

Text painting: Ascending line for "the eternal light born of light" (see note on the Nicene Creed).

The second phrase is given greater emphasis with embellishment and longer vocal pause at the cadence.

9 Choral Chorale Stanza 2 (phrase 2, ornamented); melodic line 1 three times in diminution in the continuo.

Recit.

NBA: *itzt*
 boren, **jetzt** man in der Krippe find't. O Menschen, schauet

Right hand is editorial realization.

D minor G7 C major G major G7 C major E major

13 Choral Chorale Stanza 2 (phrase 3); melodic line 1 three times in diminution in the bass.

an, was hier der Lie-be Kraft ge-tan- In un-ser ar-mes Fleisch und Blut...

Right hand is editorial realization.

A# dim.7 B minor C major G major A7 D major D major

17 Recit. **Choral** Chorale Stanza 2 (phrase 4); melodic line 1 three times in diminution in the bass.

(und war denn dieses nicht ver-flucht, verdammt, ver-lo-ren?) ver- klei-det sich das

Chromaticism for "was this poor flesh and blood not cursed, condemned, and lost?"

Right hand is editorial realization.

Allusion to biblical passages such as Romans 8:3, Hebrews 2:14, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 3:13 (see side note).

D# dim.7 E7 C# dim.7 A7 D major G major

Descending chromatic bass line...

21 Recit.

ew' - - - - ge Gut, so wie es ja zum Se-gen aus-er-ko-ren.

NBA: *wird*

G major D7 D# dim.7 E minor E minor

The dotted rhythms are reminiscent of French imperial style.

Tenor **3. Aria** (Based on Chorale Vv. 3-4) • Incarnation: The eternal light becomes a tiny child (91/3).

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

The repeated 3-note figure points to the repeated notes that begin 3 phrases of the underlying chorale.

The clear ritornello structure presents the ritornello in Am (m. 1), Em (25), GM (43), Dm (53), EM (67), Am (79).

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) or "motto aria." After the ritornello, the singer presents the first phrase of the aria as a kind of motto. This is followed by a short instrumental bridge before the aria proper begins. The motto sets the tone (and the literary perspective) for the movement.

"Boundless" motive
Text painting: Leap up of a 7th for "[God, for whom earth's circle is] too small"—suggests God is on a lofty plane too high to be climbed (see Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:105).
Also note the high tessitura of Oboe I.

Word painting: Rising melisma for "heaven."

The text compares God's boundlessness with the narrow manger.

24

8 - gen Krip-pe_ sein.

f Ritornello

E minor E minor E7 A major F#(7)

29

8

B

Erscheinet uns dies

p

B major B7 E minor E minor E7

34

8 ew'- ge Licht, dies ew' - - - - ge

Word painting: Long sustained note for "eternal."

A minor D7 G major G7

39

8 Licht, so wird hin-fü-ro Gott uns nicht als die-ses Lichtes Kin-der has-sen.

f Ritornello

C major D7 G major G major

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44

8

Erscheinet uns dies ew' ge Licht,

p

The repeated 3-note figure is reminiscent of the repeated notes that begin 3 phrases of the underlying chorale.

G7 C major A7 D minor B-flat major

49

8

so wird hin.fü . ro Gott uns nicht als die . ses Lich . tes Kin . der has .

A minor F7 B-flat major A7 D minor

53

8

sen.

f Ritornello

D minor D7 G minor D minor

58

8

Gott, dem der Er.den.kreis zu klein,

p

D minor D minor G7

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63

8 Gott, dem der Erdenkreis zu klein, den we-der Welt noch Him-mel fas-sen, Ritornello

C major A minor D7 E7 A minor E major

68

8 Gott, dem der Er-den-kreis zu klein, **E**

A minor A minor A7

73

8 den we-der Welt noch Him-mel fas-sen,

D minor B-flat major E7 A minor

77

8 -will in der en-gen Krip-pe sein. Ritornello

A minor A7 D minor

82

A minor A minor A minor

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Bass 4. Recitativo (Based on Chorale Verse 5) •Christmas: Prepare to receive Creator as thy guest! (91/4).

Chromatic Saturation in the vocal part in 10 mm.

Bass is often the voice of authority. Here he exhorts Christendom (mentioned again in the closing movement) to prepare itself to receive the Creator.

Chromatic Saturation in the vocal part in 10 mm.

Bass is often the voice of authority. Here he exhorts Christendom (mentioned again in the closing movement) to prepare itself to receive the Creator.

Chords: A, D, F#, C, B

Lyrics: O Chri-sten-heit! Wohl-an, so ma-che dich be-reit, bei

Instrumentation: Strings

Chords: D major, G major

Chords: D#, G, E, C#, A#

Lyrics: dir den Schöpfer zu empfangen. Der grosse Gottes-sonn kommt als ein Gast zu dir ge-

Chords: (B7), E minor, F#7, B minor, G major

Annotation: NBA: kömmt

Chords: A major, D major, D7, G# dim.7

Lyrics: gangen. Ach, lass dein Herz durch die-se Lie-be rüh-ren; er kommt zu

Annotation: Text painting: Arioso with long ascending chromatic scale for "lead you out of this vale of tears to his throne."

Tempo: Adagio

Chords: E7, A minor, A-flat major, E dim.7, F minor, C7, F minor, A half dim.7

Lyrics: dir, um dich vor sei-nen Thron durch die-ses Jam-

Annotation: Tortured chromaticism to depict being led out of the "Jammertal."

Annotation: Viola has parallel 5ths.

Chords: B-flat dim.7 major, C minor, C7, N6, (B dim.7), F# dim.7, C minor, G7, A-flat aug. major 7, C7, F minor, B dim.7, C major

Lyrics: mer-tal zu-füh-ren.

Annotation: Parallel 5ths between singer & viola.

Annotation: Harmonic clashes

Annotation: Ascending chromatic fourth in continuo (see side note and no. 5 at mm. 37-40).

Annotation: For the significance of C, see side note.

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann). After the ritornello, the singer presents the first phrase of the aria as a kind of motto. This is followed by a short instrumental bridge before the aria proper begins. The motto sets the tone (and the literary perspective) for the movement.

5. Aria (Duetto)

(Based on Chorale Verse 6)
●Incarnation: Christ became poor so we might be rich (91/5).

This is the longest movement in the cantata and explores the key aspect of the Incarnation.

The repeated 3-note figure (here in imperial French dotted style) is reminiscent of the repeated notes that begin 3 phrases of the underlying chorale.

Unison violins

Ritornello (Imperial processional style: dotted figure over walking bass)

E minor

G7 C major E7 A minor

The text alludes to 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." (Also Ephesians 2:7, 3:16, Colossians 1:27, 2:2.) The contrast implicit in the Incarnation give rise to musical differentiation:
-Majestic, processional, dotted figures (unison violins over a marching bass) depict the glory of heaven—which Christ left and to which he will bring believers, as referenced in the text.
-Sinuous vocal lines, with dissonant suspensions or chromatic ascent depict the poor, arduous human condition as described in the text (unrelated to ritornello).
For an alternate explanation by Alfred Dürr, see side note.

First half of A Section (text lines 1–3).

Die Ar -

Dissonant suspension for "poverty."

Die Ar - - mut , -

Soprano

Alt

A minor E minor (B7) E minor E minor E minor

6

mut ,so Gott auf sich nimmt, die Ar - mut ,

so Gott auf sich nimmt, die Ar -

Ritornello

E minor E minor

9

so Gott auf sich nimmt, hat uns ein e - wig

mut , so Gott auf sich nimmt, hat uns ein e - wig

Majestic processional figure...

F# major B minor B minor

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Word painting: Long melismas for "eternal."

11

Heil, ein e - - - - - wig
Heil, ein e - - - - - wig Heil

B minor B minor

13II

NBA: an (each time) *tr*

Heil bestimmt, den Ü - berfluss von HimmelsSchät - zen.
bestimmt, den Ü - berfluss von HimmelsSchät - zen.

f Ritornello Majestic processional figure...

B minor B minor

16

B minor D7 G major G major B7 E minor F#7 B minor

18II

A

Second half of A Section (text lines 1-3).

Die Ar - - - mut , die Ar -
Die Ar - - - mut , die Ar - - - mut ,

p Majestic processional figure continues...

B minor B minor B7 E major E7 A7 D7

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21

mut, die Armut, so Gott auf sich

die Armut, die Armut, so Gott auf sich

G7 E7 A minor A minor

24

nimmt, die Armut, so Gott auf sich

nimmt, die Armut, so Gott auf sich

Dissonant suspension for "poverty."

Ritornello Majestic processional figure...

A minor A minor B7 E minor

27

nimmt, hat uns ein ewig Heil, ein ewig Heil

nimmt, hat uns ein ewig Heil, ein ewig Heil

Sweet parallel 3rds & 6ths for "eternal salvation."

E minor E7 A minor

29

wig Heil bestimmt, den

wig Heil bestimmt, den

Word painting: Long melismas for "eternal."

A minor B(7) E minor

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31

Ü - berfluss von Himmels Schät - zen.

Ü - berfluss von Himmels Schät - zen.

Ritornello Majestic processional figure...

E minor E minor

33II

E minor G7 C major E7 A minor B7 E minor E minor

36

B A syncopated vocal line, which reinforces the majestic dotted processional figure of the instruments, provides counterpoint to a rising chromatic vocal line.

Sein menschlich We - sen,

Syncopated vocal line reinforces the majestic dotted processional figure.

Majestic processional figure...

E minor A minor D7 G major E7

First half of B Section (text lines 4-6): The ascending chromatic 4th appears in each line (successively up a fifth, all in sharp keys): Am: m. 36; Em: m. 39; Bm: m. 41; F#m: m. 44.

Sein mensch - lich We - sen ma - chet -

Ascending chromatic fourth depicts arduous human condition (see side note).

sein menschlich Wesen, sein menschlich We - sen ma - chet -

Ascending chromatic fourth.

Majestic processional figure...

D major B7 E minor A7 D major

38II

sein menschlich Wesen, sein menschlich We - sen ma - chet -

euch den Engels-Herr - lichkei - ten

Ascending chromatic fourth.

Majestic processional figure...

D major B7 E minor A7 D major

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41

euch, sein menschlich We - sen ma - chet
gleich, den En - gels - Herr - lich - kei - ten gleich, euch

Unison violins: Ascending chromatic fourth.

F# major B minor E7 A major F# major B minor

43II

euch den En - gels - Herr - lich - kei - ten gleich, euch zu der
zu der En - gel Chor, euch zu der En - gel

Ascending chromatic fourth.

E major C#7 F# minor B7 E major C#7 F# minor

46

En - gel Chor, zu der En - gel Chor zu set -
Chor, zu der En - gel Chor zu set -

E7 A major E7

48II

- zen, euch zu der Engel Chor zu set - zen.
- zen, zu der En - gel Chor zu set - zen. Ritornello Majestic processional figure

C#7 F# minor F# minor

Eric Chafe notes that at the juncture in the middle of Section B there is a tonal confrontation between F# minor and G minor, the ancient "mi contra fa" distinction. See Eric Chafe, *Tonal Allegory in the Vocal Music of J. S. Bach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 176.

Second half of B Section (text lines 4-6): The ascending chromatic 4th appears in each line (successively up a fifth, in flat keys): Cm: m. 58; Gm: m. 61; Dm: m. 63; Am: m. 66.

Sein menschlich Wesen

Sein menschlich Wesen

F# minor A7 D major D major D7 G minor

Dissonant suspension for "human/mortal nature."

ma chet euch den En

ma chet euch den

Ritornello

G minor G minor

gels Herrlich keiten gleich;

En gels-Herrlich keiten gleich;

Ritornello Majestic processional figure

G7 C minor G7 C minor

sein menschlich Wesen

sein menschlich We

Ascending chromatic fourth.

C minor F7 B-flat major G major

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60

ma - chet — euch, sein menschlich We - - -

- sen, sein mensch - lich We - sen, sein mensch - lich

Ascending chromatic fourth.

C minor F major D7 G minor

62

- - - sen ma - chet euch den En -

We - - sen ma - chet — euch, sein menschlich We -

F major D major G minor C major A major D minor

64

- - - gels-Herrlich - kei - ten gleich, euch zu der - En -

- - - sen ma - chet euch den En -

Unison violins: Ascending chromatic fourth.

G7 C major A major D minor G major E(7)

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66

"Mezzo circolo"

- - - gel Chor, - - - euch zu der En - - gel

- - - gels - Herr - lich - kei - ten gleich, euch zu der

"Figura circulatio" and "circulo mezzo" used for angels (see note at no. 1).

A minor D7 G major E7 A minor

68

Chor, zu der En - - gel Chor zu set - -

En - - gel Chor, zu der En - - gel Chor zu set -

G(7) C major

70

- - - zen, zu der En - gel Chor zu set - zen.

- - - zen, euch zu der En - gel Chor zu set - zen.

E7 A minor A minor da capo

6. Choral (Verse 7) (See also 64/2, 248/28.)
 •Christmas: Let all praise God for this gift of love! (91/6).

+Ob I, II, III
Vln I

+Vln II

+Vla

Corno I
Corno II
Timpani

Continuo
Fagotto
Organo

Das hat er Al - les uns ge - tan, sein' gross' Lieb' zu

Das hat er Al - les uns ge - tan sein' gross' Lieb' zu

Das hat er Al - les uns ge - tan, sein' gross' Lieb' zu

Das hat er Al - les uns ge - tan, sein' gross' Lieb' zu

4

G major G7 C major C major D7

zei - gen an; dess freu' sich al - le Chri - sten - heit und dank' ihm dess in

zei - gen an; dess freu' sich al - le Chri - sten - heit und dank' ihm dess in

zei - gen an; dess freu' sich al - le Chri - stenheit und dank' ihm dess in

zei - gen an; dess freu' sich al - le Chri - sten - heit und dank' ihm dess in

Text painting:
 Animated voice leading for "let all Christendom rejoice over this and thank him throughout eternity" (last 6 measures).

8

G major G major A7 D major D7 G major

E - wig - keit. Ky - rie - e NBA syllable division - leis!

E - wig - keit. Ky - ri - e - e - leis!

E - wig - keit. Ky - ri - ri e - e - leis!

E - wig - keit. Ky - ri - e - e - leis!

G major G major

Corno I plays the "figura circulatio," associated with heaven's angels, referenced earlier (see no. 1 with note and no. 5).