

J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 124 Form: Chorus/Fantasia - Recit (T) - Aria (T) - Recit (B) - Duet (S/A) - Chorale.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/5; BC A30

1. S. after Epiphany (BWV 154, 124, 32)

*Romans 12:1-61 (Christian duty: present yourselves as living sacrifices to God)

*Luke 2:41-52 (Jesus' parents lose Jesus in Jerusalem and later find him in the temple)

Librettist: Unknown

FP: 7 January 1725 (St. Nicholas)

This cantata belongs to Bach's chorale cantata cycle (see note).

The underlying six-stanza chorale of 1658 was written by Christian Keyman (1607-1662). Each stanza ends with the line "Meinen Jesum laß ich nicht." Alfred Dürr writes, "As in the previous year (BWV 154), the text of this cantata, composed for 7 January 1725, refers to the Gospel reading. The faithful Christian, like Jesus's parents at one time, desires not to lose Jesus but to follow Him in all circumstances. Thus far, the choice of the hymn... is comprehensible. Further on, however, the biblical account and the chorale text depart from each other considerably... The anonymous librettist, who adapts each of these verses to form a madrigalian movement, has taken no steps to establish further links with the Sunday Gospel. Instead, he gives free rein to a truly baroque predilection for graphic descriptions of death and disdain for this world.

Cantata No. 124

Meinen Jesum laß ich nicht

(Coro.)

124/1. (Tempo giusto. ♩ = 80.)

(Chorale Verse 1) • Clinging to Jesus so not to lose him (124/1).

Oboe d'amore has solo role.

Cantata about clinging to Jesus with ravishing oboe d'amore lines.

Instrumentation:

- Corno
- Oboe d'amore
- Vln I, II
- Vla
- SATB
- Continuo, Organo

Ritornello
Figure A:
sarabande rhythm.

Sarabande-like (Some authors call it a minuet.) E major (for significance, see note).

E major

In the opening movement, a concertante oboe d'amore has long swirls of 16th notes that leave little place to breathe. While the chorale cantus firmus is presented in regular note values accompanied by lightly imitative counterpoint, three musical figures from the ritornello provide the instrumental material or the rest of the movement.



E7 A major (B7) E major

E major E major

E major G#7

C# minor F#7 B major

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21. Soprano. +Corno **A** (Mel.: „Meinen Jesum lass' ich nicht“.)

Alto. **Stollen 1 of chorale's bar form.** Mei - nen Je - sum

Tenore. Mei - nen Je - sum

Basso. Mei - nen

B major B major B7 E major

A *tr*

Figure A. (Figure B).

25. lass' ich nicht, — While the cantus firmus holds its last note, the lower voices repeat the line in light polyphony. Each phrase ending is handled this way but in varied manner and with growing intensity.

lass' ich nicht, lass' ich nicht, mei - nen Je - sum lass' ich

Je - sum lass' ich nicht, mei - nen Je - sum lass' ich

Mei - nen Je - sum lass' ich nicht, Je - sum lass' ich

tr *tr*

Figure B.

E major E7 A major B7

30. The lower voices "cling to Jesus" a bit longer, as if oblivious...

Line 2. weil er

nicht, weil er

nicht, weil er

nicht, weil er

cf. m. 8. cf. m. 9. cf. m. 10. cf. m. 11.

B *mf* Figure B.

Ritornello Figure C.

E major E major

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34.

sich für mich ge - ge - ben,
 sich für mich ge - ge - ben, weil er
 sich für mich ge - ge - ben, weil er
 sich für mich ge - ge - ben,

cf. m. 12. cf. m. 13. cf. m. 14.

Figure C.

F#7 B major B7 (E major) F#7 B major B7

38.

While the cantus firmus holds its last note, the lower voices repeat the line in light polyphony.

sich für mich ge - ge - ben,
 sich für mich ge - ge - ben,
 weil er sich für mich ge - ge - ben,

cf. m. 1. cf. m. 2. cf. m. 3. cf. m. 4.

Figure A.

The bass "clings to Jesus" a bit longer, as if oblivious.

E major

42.

Ritornello Figure B.

Figure C.

E major E major

46.

Figure B.

E major E7 A major

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C 50. Line 3.

Stollen 2.

so er - for - dert mei - ne

so er - for - dert mei - ne

so er - for - dert mei - ne

so er - for - dert mei - ne

Figure C.

E major E7 (A major) B(7)

53.

Pflicht, — While the cantus firmus holds its last note, the lower voices repeat the line in light polyphony.

Pflicht, so er - for - dert mei - ne Pflicht,

Pflicht, so er - for - dert mei - ne Pflicht,

Pflicht, so er for - dert mei - ne Pflicht,

(Figure C).

Ritornello Figure B.

G#7 C# minor C# minor

57.

Strings (while ob d'am hplds C# for 3 mm....)

Figure A.

Figure A.

C# minor C# major F# minor

62.

Str. ob tr holds...

Figure A.

Figure A.

(Figure C).

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

D 67. Line 4.

klet - ten - weis' an ihm zu kle -

klet - ten - weis' an ihm zu kle -

klet - ten - weis' an ihm zu kle -

klet - ten - weis' an ihm zu kle -

D

Figure B. Figure C.

E major E7 A major B7 E major B7

71.

ben.

ben, klet - ten - weis' an ihm zu kle - ben.

ben, klet - ten - weis' an ihm zu kle - ben.

ben, an ihm zu kle - ben.

cf. m. 1. tr. cf. m. 2. cf. m. 3. cf. m. 4. cf. m. 6.

Figure A. Ritornello Figure B.

E major E major E major E7

77.

Figure C.

p *mf*

A major A major

81.

C#7 F# minor B7

E 84. Line 5.

Abgesang of chorale's bar form.

Er ist mei - nes Le - bens

Er ist mei - nes Le - bens

Er ist mei - nes Le - bens

Figure C.

E major E7 A major F#7 B7 G#7

87.

While the cantus firmus holds its last note, the lower voices repeat the line in light polyphony, extending beyond the cantus firmus by 3 measures.

Licht, er ist mei - nes Le - bens Licht, er

- nes Le - bens Licht, er ist mei - nes

Licht, er ist mei - nes Le - bens

The oboe d'amore circles around C. For possible significance, see note.

C# minor C# minor

90.

The lower voices "cling to Jesus" longer, as if oblivious.

ist mei - nes Le - bens Licht,

Le - bens Licht, Le - bens Licht,

Licht, mei - nes Le - bens Licht,

Strings

Ritornello Figure A.

C# minor

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93. (Figure C.) Figure A. (Figure C),
C# minor

97. F#7 B minor E7

100. A major (B7) G# minor E major

103. C#7 F# minor B7

F 106. Line 6.
mei - - nen Je - - sum lass' ich nicht,
mei - - nen Je - - sum lass' ich nicht, mei - - nen
mei - - nen Je - - sum lass' ich nicht, mei - - nen
mei - - nen Je - - sum lass' ich nicht,
F (Figure C.) Figure B. Figure C.
E major E major

While the cantus firmus holds its last note (this time much longer), the lower voices repeat the text another two times (plus "lass ich nicht" once more) in light polyphony. In this way, the chorale's allusion to Jacob wrestling with the angel (Genesis 3:26: I will not let you go unless you bless me) is connected to the day's

Gospel reading (Jesus' parents losing Jesus and not finding him until 3 days later (Luke 2:45-46: When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. After three days they found him in the temple). "Clinging to Jesus" also suggests the mystic union of Christ (bridegroom) and the believer (bride). For full text of biblical allusions, see note.

110.



Je - - sum lass' ich nicht, mei - nen Je - sum lass' ich
Je - - sum lass' ich nicht, mei - nen Je - sum lass' ich
mei - nen Je - - sum lass' - ich nicht, lass' ich

Figure B.
E7 A major A major A major

114.

nicht, lass' ich nicht.
nicht, lass' - ich nicht.
nicht, lass' - ich nicht.

Figure C. Ritornello
A major (B7) E major

117.

C#7 F# minor B7

120.

(Figure B). Figure B.
E major E major E major

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124/2. ^{Secco} **Recitativo.** (Based on Chorale Verse 2) • Clinging to Jesus in life: Giving him all I am (124/2).
Tenore.

1.

So lan - ge sich ein Trop - fen Blut in Herz und A - dern
 As long-as - a drop of-blood in (my) heart and veins

A major D major E7

3.

re - get, soll Je - sus nur al - lein mein Le - ben und mein Al - les
 does-stir, shall Jesus - alone my life and my all

A major C# major F# minor

5.

sein. Mein Je - sus, der an mir so gro - sse Din - ge thut, ich
 be. My Jesus, who for me such great things does, I

Allusion to Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:49): For he who is mighty has done great things for me (Luther 1545: Denn er hat große Dinge an mir getan).

F# minor (B7) G#7 C# minor

8.

kann ja nichts als meinen Leib und Leben ihm zum Geschenke geben.
 can indeed nothing less-than my body and life to-him as gift give.

C# minor

The end of the recitative alludes to the Epistle of the day, Romans 12:1: I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

A serenely confident oboe amidst obbligato contrasts with the tenor's jumpy line, which even out into parallel 3rds & 6ths with the final 2 lines of text (the last one is a rewording of the chorale's opening text phrase, "I will not let Jesus go"). Throughout, the strings interject trembling figures to depict pervasive fear.

Aria. (Based on Chorale Verse 3) • Clinging to Jesus in the pangs of death (124/3).

124/3. (Lento $\text{♩} = 56$.)

Form (Rhyme: ABABCC)
 Ritornello (mm. 1-9) F#m
 Lines 1-6 (9-27) F#m-AM
 Rit (27-35) AM
 Lines 1-6 (35-53) AM-EM
 Rit (53-55) EM-Bm
 Lines 1-2, 5-6 (55-63) Bm-F#m
 Rit (63-71) F#m

Note: The text is repeated as a whole, then repeated a third time without lines 3-4.

1. *mf* *stacc.* F# minor

Ob d'amore

Strings repeat a trembling figure ("stile concitato") as ostinato to portray the fear of death.

For more on the "stile concitato," see note.

G#7

3.

C# minor A# dim.7 F#7 B minor

6.

C#7 F# minor

9. Tenore.

Und wenn der har - te To - des - schlag

pp Ob d'am

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

12.

die Sin - nen schwächt, — die Glie - der —

F#7 B minor F# minor E# dim.7

15.

rüh - ret, wenn der dem Fleisch verhasste

Ob d'am

F# minor F# minor G#7

19.

Tag nur Furcht und Schrek.

Ob d'am

C# minor A# dim.7 F#7 B minor

22.

"Shudder" for "fright." - ken mit sich füh - ret, doch trö - stet sich die Zu - ver -

Ob d'am

E7 A major A major

Text painting: Serene major key for "hope in Jesus," despite continued trembling.

25.

sicht: ich las - se mei - nen Je - sum nicht!

Line 6 rewords the opening text line of the chorale.

Ritornello

mf

A major A major

Here the tenor adopts the oboe d'amore's cantabile manner in parallel 3rds and 6ths, suggesting sweetness.

28.

B7 E minor A7

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31.

D major E7

34.

Und wenn der har - te To - des.

A major A major C#7

37.

schlag die Sin - nen schwächt,

Ob d'am

F#7 A# dim.7 B minor

40.

die Gie - der rüh - ret,

F# major B7 B# dim.7 G#(7) C# minor

43.

wenn der dem Fleisch verhas - te Tag

Ob d'am

C# minor D#7 G# minor (E7)

46. nur Furcht und Schrek - Shudder - ken mit sich

C#7 F# minor B7 E major

49. füh - ret, so tröstet sich die Zu - ver - sicht: Ich las - se

Word change from "doch" ("yet") to "so" ("then"),

Ob d'am Here the tenor adopts the oboe d'amore's cantabile manner in parallel motion.

B7 E major

52. mei - - nen Je - sum nicht!

E major E major E minor F#7

55. Und wenn der har - - te To - desschlag die Sin - nen schwächt, -

Ob d'am

B minor C#7 F# minor

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Lines 3-5 omitted.

Here the tenor adopts the oboe d'amore's cantabile manner in parallel motion.

58.

die Glieder rühret, doch tröstet sich die Zu-ver.

B# dim.7 C# major F# minor

61.

sicht: ich lasse meinen Jesum nicht!

F# minor F# minor

64.

G#7 C# minor A# dim.7

66.

F#7 B minor

68.

C#7 F# minor F# minor

Secco

Recitativo.

124/4.

Basso.

(Based on Chorale Verse 4) • Losing Jesus: Reunion with him after death (124/4).

Bass is often the voice of authority, such as the minister.

1.

Doch, ach! welch' schweres Un - ge - mach empfindet noch all - hier die
 Yet alas, what severe hardship experiences yet here (my)

E(7) F#7 B minor iv6

Phrygian cadence, often used for questions.

3.

See - le? Wird nicht die hart gekränkte Brust zu ei - ner Wü - stenei und Marter -
 soul? Will not my sorely vexed breast (become) a wilderness and den-of-torment?

V B7 D# dim.7

6. Allusion to the Gospel reading: Jesus' parents losing Jesus.

6.

höhle bei Jesu schmerzlichstem Ver - lust? Allein mein Geist sieht gläubig auf und an den
 with Jesus' most-grievous loss? But-yet my spirit looks in-faith up - to the

Phrygian cadence

E7 A major D# dim.7 B major E7 (F#7)

9.

9.

Ort, wo Glaub' und Hoffnung pran - gen, all - wo ich nach voll - brachtem
 place where faith and hope shine-resplendent, where I after completed

F# major A# dim.7 B minor

Biblical allusions:
 2 Timothy 4:6-8: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race (Luther 1545: Lauf vollendet), I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."
 Song of Solomon 3:4 [Bride]: "I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go."
 Luke 2: 27-28. Inspired by the Spirit [Simeon] came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God...

11.

11.

Lauf dich, Je - su, e - wig soll umfangen.
 race, thee, Jesus, eternally shall embrace.

Word painting: Ascending run for "Lauf."

E7 A major A major

Duetto. Da capo aria.

124/5. (Allegro moderato $\text{♩} = 124.$) (Based on Chorale Verse 5) • Forsaking the world: Future in heaven with Jesus (124/5).

1. *Ritornello* *mf* Continuo abne...

A major B7 E major E7 C# minor

6.

E7 A major

12. **Soprano.** Text painting: Rising scale for the heart's flight from the world.

Ent - zie - he - dich ei - lends, mein Herze, der Welt, du findest im Him - mel dein

Canon

Alto. In many respects, the duet is reminiscent of BWV 78/2, "Wir eilen mit schwachen, doch emsigen Schritten," written 8 months later for the 14th Sunday after Trinity. There the canonic structure appears to represent two lepers hurrying to Jesus. Here, the scurrying is away from the world to heaven. Mary Greer argues that many of Bach's sacred duets serve as metaphors for faith. Her study includes Cantata 124 but not Cantata 78. See "Embracing Faith: The Duet as Metaphor in Selected Sacred Cantatas by J. S. Bach," *Bach* 34/1 (2003): 1–71. The duet may remind listeners of the day's reading: Mary and Joseph scurrying back to Jerusalem to seek Jesus, only to find him in the temple (a metaphor for heaven).

Ent - zie - he - dich ei - lends, mein

A major B(7) E major

19.

wahres Ver - gnü - gen, dein wah - - - res Ver - gnü - gen,
Her - ze, der Welt, du findest im Himmel dein wahres Ver - gnü - gen,

E major E7

25.

Ritornello *mf*

C# minor E7 A major

31.

ent - zie - he - dich
ent - zie - he - dich ei - lents, mein Her - ze, der Welt, du fin - dest im

A major B minor D major E(7)

37.

ei - lents, mein Her - ze, der Welt, du fin -
Him - mel dein wah - res Ver - gnü - gen, du - fin - dest im

A major E major G# minor C# minor

42.

- dest im Himmel dein wah - res Ver - gnügen, dein wah - res - Ver - gnügen,
Him - mel dein wah - res, dein wah - res Ver - gnügen,

B7 E major E major

48. Soprano.

ent - zie - he - dich ei - lents, mein Her - ze, der

Ritornello

E major E major E7 A major

54. *Alto.*
 Welt, du findest im Him-mel dein wah-res Ver-gnü-gen, du-
 ent-zie-he dich-ei-lends, mein Her-ze, der Welt,

A major A7 D major E7

59.
 fin-dest im Him-mel dein wah-res, dein
 du fin-dest im Himmel dein wah-res Ver-gnü-gen, dein

C# minor E7 A7 D major 7 E7

65.
 wah-res Ver-gnü-gen, du findest im Himmel dein wah-res Ver-gnü-gen.
 wah-res Ver-gnü-gen, dein wah-res Ver-gnü-gen.

A major A major A major

71.
Ritornello

B7 E major E7 C# minor

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76.

E7 A major 7 A major

82. B Section.

Wenn künft.ig dein Au-ge den
Wenn künft.ig dein Au-ge den Heiland er - blickt, dein Au - - ge den

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

89.

Hei.land er - blickt, dein Au - - - ge den Hei.land er - blickt, so
Hei - land er - blickt, so wird erst dein seh.nen.des Her.ze er - quickt, dein

B minor B7 E major E7

95.

wird erst dein seh.nen.des Her.ze er - quickt, so wird es in Je - su zu -
seh - - - nen.des Her - ze er - quickt, so

A major A major A major

101.

frie - den, in Je - su zu - frieden ge - stellt.
wird es in Je - su zu - frie den ge - stellt.

The tenor's sustained note perhaps suggests "clinging to Jesus" (see Martin Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:425).

mf Ritornello

C#7 F# minor F# minor

107.

F# minor

112. **Soprano.**

Wenn künf - tig dein Au - ge den Hei - land er -

F# minor G#7 C# minor C# minor

117.

blickt, dein Au - ge den Hei - land er - blickt, so
Alto.
Wenn künf - tig dein Au - ge den Hei - land er - blickt, dein

C# minor C#7 F# minor F# minor F#7

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122.

wird erst dein seh-nen-des Her-ze er-quickt, dein seh-
 Au-ge-den Hei-land er-blickt, so wird erst dein

B major B7 E major

127.

- nen-des Her-ze er-quickt, so
 seh-nen-des Her-ze er-quickt, so wird es in Je-su zu-

E major

The alto's sustained note perhaps suggests "clinging to Jesus" (see Petzoldt, Bach Kommentar 2:425).

132.

wird es in Je-su zu-frie-den ge-stellt.
 frie-den, in Je-su zu-frieden ge-stellt.

G#7 C# minor C# minor

Da Capo.

With the final stanza, the libretto begins to describe the mystical union of Jesus and the soul with language reminiscent of Song of Solomon 3:4: "I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go (Luther 1545: Ich halte ihn und will ihn nicht lassen).

124/6. **Choral.** (Mel.: „Meinen Jesum lass' ich nicht“) (Verse 6) (See also 154/8, 157/5.) Note: Bach had used this chorale stanza to end BWV 154, the cantata for the same Sunday a year earlier. The tune, by Andreas Hammerschmidt, is also used to close BWV 70.

+Corno
Ob d'am I
Vln I

1. **Soprano.**
Je - sum lass' ich nicht von mir, geh' ihm e - wig' an der Sei -

Alto.
Je - sum lass' ich nicht von mir, geh' ihm e - wig' an der Sei -

Tenore.
Je - sum lass' ich nicht von mir, geh' ihm e - wig' an der Sei -

Basso.
Je - sum lass' ich nicht von mir, geh' ihm e - wig' an der Sei -

5. E major E major B major F#7 B major

ten; Chri - stus lässt mich für und für zu den Le - bens - bäch - lein

ten; Chri - stus lässt mich für und für zu den Le - bens - bäch - lein

ten; Chri - stus lässt mich für und für zu den Le - bens - bäch - lein

ten; Chri - stus lässt mich für und für zu den Le - bens - bäch - lein

Text painting:
The constant flow of 8ths in the bass line depicts "Christus lässt mich...zu den Lebensbächlein leiten" ("Christ guides me to the streams of life"), an allusion to biblical passages such as Psalm 23, among others (see note).



9. B major E major E major G# minor C#7 F# minor C# minor C# minor E major E major

lei - ten. Se - lig, der mit mir so spricht: Meinen Je - sum lass' ich nicht.

lei - ten. Se - lig, der mit mir so spricht: Meinen Je - sum lass' ich nicht.

lei - ten. Se - lig, der mit mir so spricht: Meinen Je - sum lass' ich nicht.

lei - ten. Se - lig, der mit mir so spricht: Meinen Je - sum lass' ich nicht.