

Cantatas BWV 151

Form: Aria (S) - Recit (B) - Aria (A) - Recit (T) - Chorale.

Introduction & updates at melvinunger.com.

NBA I/3; BC A17

3. Day of Christmas (BWV 64, 133, 151, 248-III)

Odd years: *Hebrews 1:1-14 (God spoke through his Son, who is superior to the angels)

Odd years: *John 1:1-14 (Prologue: In the beginning was the Word...and the Word became flesh)

Even years (celebrated as Feast of St. John the Apostle)

*John 21:20-24 (Jesus' words to Peter about John)

*1 John 1:1-10 (God is light, the blood of Christ cleanses from sin)

Librettist: Georg Christian Lehms (see note 1)

FP: 27 December 1725 (Leipzig: St. Nicholas)

This cantata belongs to Bach's third cycle in Leipzig (see notes 2 & 3).

The cantata is in chiasmic form. Bach often used chiasmic (x-shaped/symmetrical) forms, in which center movements (where the mirror image begins) provide the crux of the matter. There antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). See note for more.

J.S. Bach



Cantata No. 151

Süßer Trost, mein Jesus kömmt

Martin Petzoldt outlines the symmetry (*Bach-Kommentar* 2:231):

3. A aria. Comfort in Jesus' humility, riches in his poverty
4. T recit. The Son of God has opened heaven.
2. B rect. God wants to save me.
5. Chorale. Today he opens the door again.
1. S aria. Today Jesus is born.

In no. 1, Bach contrasts "comfort" and "joy" with two contrasting sections: one in 12/8 meter marked "molto adagio," the other in alla breve meter marked "vivace."

Arie

• Christ's birth signifies my election for heaven (151/1).

Molto Adagio

1. Fl.

151/1. Str. piano sempre

G major

G major The 12/8 meter and timbre of the flute provide a dreamy, pastoral atmosphere, perhaps also intended as a rocking cradle motive.

Instrumentation:

Flauto traverso

Oboe d'amore (added later)

Vln I, II

Vla

SATB

Continuo

A cantata of chamber dimensions for the 3rd day Christmas. (see note).

Form (Rhyme: ABCCB)
12/8, molto adagio
Ritornello (mm. 1-10) GM
A. Lines 1-2: (11-24) GM
Rit (24-29) Em-GM [Fine]
Alla breve, vivace
B. Lines 3-5 (30-54) Em-Bm
da capo



3

D major

Regarding Bach's emotional state at the time, see note.



6

A major

A minor

D7

8

G major

9

(A7)

D7

G major

For biblical background, see note.



A Soprano

11

Sweet comfort/solace, my Je - sus, my Je - sus
Bless - ed morn, when Je - sus, when Je - sus was

The soprano sings a simplified version of the flute melody.

Strings, Ob d'am

Str.

G major

The opening words are repeated to start the second line.

The flute resumes its melody, symboling "Trost" (comfort) and expands it.

13

kömmt, sü - ßer Trost, Je - sus wird an - itzt ge - bo -
comes, bless - ed morn, when to us a Sa - viour was giv -

Fl.

G major A major

15

ren, sü - ßer Trost, sü - ßer
en, bless - ed morn, bless - ed

D major G# dim.7 E7

16

Trost, mein Je - sus kömmt, sü - ßer Trost, Je - sus
morn, when Je - sus was born, bless - ed morn, when to

A minor A minor D7

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18

wird an- itzt ge- bo- ren,
us a Sa- viour was giv- en,

G major

19

B

sü- ßer Trost,
bless- ed morn,

G# dim.7 E7

20

sü- ßer Trost, sü- ßer Trost, mein Je- sus kommt, mein
bless- ed morn, bless- ed morn, when Je- sus was born, when

Fl.

The flute takes up the head motive

A minor D7 G major

22

Je- sus kömmt, Je- sus wird an- itzt ge-
Je- sus was born, when to us a Sa- viour was

G major

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23

bo - ren, sü - ßer Trost, Je - sus wird an - itzt ge -
giv - en, bless - ed morn, when to us a sa - viour was

G major

24

bo - ren!
giv - en!

G major

E minor

A7

B7

C

Ritornello (shortened)

26

E7

A major

A7

tr

27

D7

G major

28

G major

tr

Fine

To contrast the "joy" B section with the "Trost" ("comfort") A section Bach changes meter and tempo. In this way, the movement does not conform to the Baroque Unity of Affect. The primary motive is derived from the head motive of the A section, interrupted with triplets for "freuet" ("rejoice").

ch - m. 11. **D** Sü - - - - - ber Trost, -

30. Herz und See - le. **Tutti** Herz und See - le freu - - - -

Come, ye faith-ful, come ye faith-ful, joy - - - -

Cemb. Viol. tr

E minor

Word painting: Triplets for "freuet" ("rejoice").

Alfred Dürr writes, "The quick middle section is pervaded by its opening motive. At first it is sung by the soprano, but the instruments take it up repeatedly, interrupted by triplet melismas from the voice on 'freuet sich' ('rejoice'), which are thereafter played on the flute in a similar concertante fashion but in an enhanced form." See Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, revised and translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 130–131.

32. et sich, **Tutti** Herz und
ful be. Flute takes up the triplets. Come, ye

Vln I Ob d'am

D7 G major B7 E minor

34. See - le freu - et sich, denn mein lieb - ster Gott hat mich nun zum Him -
faith-ful, joy - ful be, for our lov - ing Lord pre - par - eth for us

Fl.

Upper strings & oboe d'amore tacet...

E minor D7

36. mel aus - er - ko - ren, zum Him - mel aus - er - ko - ren, **Tutti**
a heav'n-ly dwell - ing, for us a heav'n-ly dwelling,

G major G7 C major

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E

Herz und See - le, Herz und See - le freu -
Come, ye faith - ful, come, ye faith - ful, joy -

38

D major G major E major A minor

et sich, Herz und
ful be, come, ye

40

G7 C major B7 E minor

Flute and singer have simultaneous triplets.

See - le freu - et sich, freu - et sich, denn mein
faith - ful joy - ful be, joy - ful be, for our

42

Upper strings & oboe d'amore tacet...

E minor

lieb - ster Gott hat mich nun zum Him - mel aus - er - ko - ren.
lov - ing Lord pre - par - eth for us a heav'nly dwell - ing. Tutti

44

D7 G major F#7 B minor

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F

Herz und See - le freu - et sich, denn mein lieb - ster Gott hat
Heart and soul rejoice, - for my dearest God has

46

B minor B minor A major D major

The reference to divine election points to the Gospel reading: To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God (John 1:12).

mich nun zum Him - mel aus - er - ko - ren, zum Him - mel aus - er - ko -
me now for heaven elected. for us a heav'n - ly dwell -

48

Upper strings & oboe d'amore tacet... Continuo alone...

D major F#7 B minor

G

ren, zum Him - mel aus - er - ko -
ing, for us a heav'n - ly dwell

50

Vln II Vla FI, Vln I, Ob d'am FI Vln I Ob

B minor B minor

Triplets now used for "auserkoren" ("chosen/elected").

Simultaneous triplets.

- ren, zum Himmel aus - er - ko - ren.
- ing, for us a heav'n - ly dwell - ing.

52

+Vln II, Ob d'am Continuo alone...

Da Capo B minor

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The recitative incorporates many biblical themes (see note for representative biblical passages).

For biblical background, see note.

151/2. **Recitativ** •Christmas: God sent his Son to earth to deliver us (151/2).
Melisma for "erfreue" ("rejoice").

D/C# clash for "Schmerz" ("pain").

1. Basso

Self-address:

Er freu - e dich mein Herz, denn it zo weicht der Schmerz, der dich so
Re-joyce, o heart, re-joyce, for now is all the pain, which long hath

Secco

D major

lan - ge Zeit ge - drückt hat. Gott hat den lieb - sten Sohn, den er so
bur - de - ned thee, re - moved; our God, in his great love, his own be -

D major

F# major

hoch und teu - er hält, auf die - se Welt ge - schik - ket. Er läßt den Him - mels.
loved Son hath sent to earth for our re - demp - tion. He left his throne a -

F#7

B minor

G# dim.

Text painting: Descending line for Christ's descent from "heaven's throne" to "the world").

thron und will die gan - ze Welt aus ih - ren Skla - ven - ket - ten und ih - rer
bove, that all the sons of man might be de - li - vered from the cru - el

Sklavenketten = chains of slavery.

C# major

C#7

Praise of the Incarnation: Amazement is shown by unusual harmonic progression.

Dienstbarkeit er - retten. O wunder - vol - le Tat! Gott wird ein Mensch und will auf Erden noch
bonds of sin and death. Am - a - zing gift of love! That God should deign with man to dwell. Our

F# minor

D7

D# dim.7

Allusion to the Gospel reading: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14).

Chromatic inflection for "ärmer" "(poorer)".

nied-ri-ger als wir und noch viel är-mer wer-den.
mor-tal frame to share, our pov-er-ty and weakness.

E minor N6 E minor E minor

This is the central (pivot) movement in the cantata's chiastic form, where antithetical elements meet or are paradoxically inverted (formal inversion reflects an aspect of reversal or turning in the text). Here the paradox is that Christ's abasement has resulted in the exaltation of humankind.

Form (Rhyme: ABCCCB)
Ritornello (mm. 1-) Em
A. Lines 1-2 (9-13) Em-BM
Rit (13-17) E7-Em
Lines 1-2 (17-27) Em-DM
Rit (27-29) Bm-GM
Lines 1-2 (29-37) EM-Bm
Rit (37-41) Bm
B. Lines 3-6 (41-49) Em-AM
Rit (49-53) BM-AM
Lines 3-6 (53-68) DM-GM
Rit (68-79) GM-Em
A'. Lines 1-2 (78-82) Em-BM
Rit (82-86) E7-Em
Lines 1-2 (86-96) Em-Bm
Rit (96-98) Em-CM
Lines 1-2 (98-106) Am-Em
Rit (106-114) Em

Arie • Christ's poverty has made us rich (151/3).

In Je-su De-mut kann ich Trost, in sei-ner Är-mut Reich-tum

E minor Repeated cross figures E7 A minor (B7) E minor

A genuflecting motive (over a trudging bass of repeated cross figures) permeates the movement (also appearing in quasi-inverted form) apparently symbolizes Christ's abasement and human exaltation, respectively, as referenced in the text. In extended, "spun out" form, it is associated with God entwining "wreaths of blessing", as mentioned in the B section.

In Je-su De-mut kann ich Trost, in sei-ner Är-mut Reich-tum

E minor A7 D major D7 G7 C major D# dim.7 E minor

A Section.

Martin Petzoldt notes that the aria is "reminiscent of similarly internalizing movements in Christmas cantatas (such as "Schließe, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder, fest in deinem Glauben ein", BWV 248/31 [in the Christmas Oratorio]." See *Bach-Kommentar* 2:233-234.

In Je-su De-mut kann ich Trost, in sei-ner Är-mut Reich-tum

E minor E minor E7 A minor D# dim.7

For biblical background, see note.



fin-den, find, Tutti

B major B7 E7 A7 D major D7 G7 C major D# dim.7 E minor

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Head motive in quasi-inverted form.

Line 1, variation 1. Line 2, variation 1.

Ob d'am + Vln I solo

in Je - su De - mut kann ich Trost, in sei - ner Ar - mut Reich - tum
in Je - sus is my hope and trust, up - on his love my heart is

17 *piano*

E minor E minor E7 A minor (B7) E minor

Line 1, variation 2.

fin - den, in Je - su De - mut, in Je - su De - mut, in Je - su De - mut kann ich
rest - ing, my heart is rest - ing, my heart is resting, in Je - sus is my hope and

21

B7 E minor A7 D major G major C major E major

Line 2, variation 2. **B**

Trost, in sei - ner Ar - mut Reich - tum fin - den,
trust, up - on his love my heart is rest - ing, *Tutti*

25 *forte Ritornello*

A minor B7 E minor G major D major D7 B minor E7 A major D7

Line 1, variation 3. Line 2, variation 3.

in Je - su De - mut kann ich Trost, in sei - ner Ar - mut Reich - tum fin - den,
in Je - sus is my hope and trust, up - on his love my heart is rest - ing,

29 *piano*

G major E7 A7 D major D# dim.7 E minor F#7 B minor

Line 1, variation 4. Line 2, variation 4.

in Je - su De - - mut kann ich Trost, in sei - ner Ar - - mut Reich - tum fin -
in Jesus humility hope and trust, up - on his love my heart is rest -

33 *Chromatic inflection*

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

Text painting:
Long, low note
for "Demut"
("humility").

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den. ing. Tutti

37 forte Ritornello

B minor B minor B7 E minor F#7 B minor

B Section.

Mir macht des sel ben schlechter Stand nur lauter Heil und Wohl be .

For-me (means) his poor station, nought-but salvation and well-being - .

Ob d'am + Vln I solo

41 piano

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

kann, ja sei ne wunder vol le Hand will mir nur Segenskränze win .

fate, Yes, his wondrous hand will for-me nought-but wreaths-of-blessing twine.

45

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

den. ing. Tutti

49 Ritornello forte

A major B major E7 A major B7 E(7) A7 D# dim.7 A major

In the B section, the head motive is developed in a more upward direction to symbolize the antithetical reward of abasement in this life—the plaiting of "Segenskränze" ("crowns of blessing"). The bible mentions various crowns awarded to believers. See, for example, 2 Timothy 4:8: "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."

Mir macht des sel ben schlechter Stand nur lauter Heil und Wohl be .

He made him self of low es tate for us he bore his cru el

Ob d'am + Vln I solo

53 piano

A major D major B7 E minor

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57

kannt, ja sei-ne wun-der-vol-le Hand will mir nur Segenskränze win-
fate, that we might en-ter at the gate which leads to glo-ry ev-er-last-

F#7 B minor D major

Long melisma and intertwining lines depict the entwining of "Segenskränze" ("crowns of blessing").

61

den, nur Se-gens-kränze, nur Segenskränze win-
ing, which leads to glo-ry, to glo-ry ev-er-last-

D major G(7) C major

65

- den, nur Se-gens-krän-ze win-den.
- ing, to glo-ry ev-er-last-ing. Tutti

D7 E minor 7 (D7) G major G major

forte Ritornello

69

= m. 1b. = m. 2. = m. 3. = m. 4.

B7 E minor E7 A minor (B7) E minor

74

= m. 5. = m. 6. = m. 7. = m. 8.

E minor A7 D major D7 G7 C major D# dim.7 E minor

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A' Section (modified da capo).

78

In Je - su De - mut kann ich Trost, in sei - ner Ar - mut Reich - tum
In Je - sus is my hope and trust, up - on his love my heart is

Ob d'am + Vln I solo

piano

= m. 9. = m. 10. = m. 11. = m. 12.

E minor E minor E7 A minor D# dim.7

82

fin - den, rest - ing, Tutti

forte Ritornello

= m. 13. = m. 14. = m. 15. = m. 16.

B major B7 E7 A7 D major D7 G7 C major D# dim.7 E minor

86

in Je - su De - mut kann ich Trost, in sei - ner Ar - mut Reich - tum
in Je - sus is my hope and trust, up - on his love my heart is

Ob d'am + Vln I solo

piano

= m. 17. = m. 18. = m. 19. = m. 20.

E minor E minor E7 A minor (B7) E minor

90

fin - den, in Je - su De - mut, in Je - su De - mut, in Je - su De - mut kann ich
rest - ing, my heart is rest - ing, my heart is rest - ing, in Je - sus is my hope and

= m. 21. = m. 22. = m. 23. = m. 24.

B7 E minor A7 D major G major C major E major

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G

Trost, in sei-ner Ar-mut Reich-tum fin-den,
 trust, up-on his love my heart is rest-ing,

94 = m. 25, = m. 26. *forte* *Ritornello* *Tutti*

A minor B7 E minor G major D major E minor D major D7 G7

in Je-su De-mut kann ich Trost, in seiner Ar-mut Reich-tum fin-den,
 in Je-sus is my hope and trust up-on his love my heart is rest-ing,

98 *piano* *Ob d'am + Vin I solo* *piano*

C major A minor D7 G major E7 A minor B7 E minor E minor

in Je-su De- - - mut kann ich Trost, in seiner Ar- - - mut Reich- - tum fin-
 in Je-sus is - - - my hope and trust, up-on his love - - - my heart is rest-

102 E minor A7 D(7) B7 E7 E minor

H

den.
 ing.

106 *forte* *Ritornello* *Tutti*

E minor G# dim.7 A minor (B7) E minor

110 E minor A7 D(7) G7 C major D# dim.7 E minor E minor

The text alludes to the day's Gospel reading: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God... In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... (John 1:1, 4–5, 14).

151/4. **Recitativ** • Prayer: Christ's condescension opened heaven for us (151/4).

For biblical background, see note.

1. **Tenore**

Secco

Du teu-rer Got-tes - sohn, nun hast du mir den Him-mel auf-ge-
 Be-lov-ed Son of God, thou hast to me the gates of Heav-en

Rhetorical emphasis with high note.

B minor A major A7

3

macht und durch dein Nied-rig-sein das Licht der Se-lig-keit zu-weg ge-bracht!
 open'd, through thy hu-mil-i-ty, the hope of an e-ter-nal life is giv'n!

B major D# dim.7 E minor D major A major

6

Weil du nun ganz al-lein des Va-ters Burg und Thron aus Lie-be ge-gen uns ver-
 As thou for us a-lone did'st leave thy Fath-er's throne, thy wond'rous love on us be-

D major D7 G major

Martin Petzoldt notes that the original libretto reads, "so wollen wir dich auch in unser Herze lassen" ("so therefore we want to let you into our hearts"). Bach changed this to "so wollen wir dich auch dafür in unser Herze fas-sen." See *Bach-Kommentar* 2:235.

9

las-sen, so wollen wir dich auch da-für in un-ser Her-ze fas-sen.
 stow-ing, so will we glad-ly un-to thee, our hearts and lifes sur-ren-der.

Bach changed the libretto a bit (see above).


G# dim.7 E7 A minor G major G major

The piano-vocal score based on the Bach-Gesellschaft Ausgabe lacks this movement. It is the final stanza of eight in the 1560 chorale by Nikolaus Herman (d. 1561). It acts as a catechismal response. The reference to cherubim guarding the entrance to paradise connects the biblical account of Adam and Eve's Fall in the Garden of Eden to the paradise described in the book of Revelation (see note).

5. Chorale

The movement is added here as set by Ramon Casadesus-Masanell, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>. The oboe would presumably be oboe d'amore.

For biblical background, see note.



First System:

- Tempo:** ♩ = 80
- Key:** G major
- Time Signature:** C
- Lyrics:** Heut' schlesst er wie - der auf die Tür zum schö - nen Pa - ra - deis, der Che - rub steht nicht

Second System:

- Lyrics:** mehr da - für, Gott sei Lob, Ehr' und Preis, Gott sei Lob, Ehr' und Preis.
- Key Changes:** D major, B minor, G major, D# dim.7, E minor, B minor, G major

Harpsichord:

Continuo: