

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").

The cantata is part of Bach's second chorale cantata cycle (see note). 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 & 3), 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.)

J.S. Bach

Chorale Cantata for Christmas
on Luther's Incarnational Hymn.

Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ

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

Rit. Motive b.

Corno I, II pedal 4 mm. Ob I Ob II Ob III Vln I

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

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

3 Vln II (up 8va) Figura corta (see side note). Corno I, II (up 8va) Rit. Motive c ("circulatio": see note). G7

Vla (up 8va) Continuo G major

5II Corno I, II

E7 A minor

8 Corno I, II Corno I

G major D7

10II

For word-for-word English translations, see Unger, *Handbook to Bach's Sacred Cantata Texts*.

Structure: Lines 1 & 2 are set in a manner similar to that of 4 & 5 (a chorale line accompanied by imitation employing ritornello motive a) is followed by a chorale line accompanied by counterpoint employing ritornello b. In the center of this symmetrical structure is line 3, "the only line in which the lower parts participate in the substance of the chorale." See Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, rev. and trans. by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 96.

13. Line 1 with ritornello motive a, imitative.

Ritornello motive a = symbol of praise (here in the shape of a rising "figura circulatoria" reminiscent of ritornello motive c) alludes to the angels' praise in the Gospel reading.

For biblical background, see note.

15II G major 16. G major

du, Je - su Christ! Parallel motion in sweet 3rds & 6ths.

- bet, ge - lo - bet seist du, Je - su Christ!

- bet, ge - lo - bet seist du, Je - su Christ!

Christ, ge - lo - bet seist du, Je - su Christ!

Vln I Ritornello Vln II

Text painting: Unusual harmonic progression to minor for the name of Christ, born in human form, as referenced in the following lines.

18 C major E7 A minor 20. Corno I, II

Vla Ob II (up 8va)

Ob I A minor Ob III (up 8va)

20II G major

D7

The image displays a page of a musical score, likely for a cantata by J.S. Bach. It features vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano accompaniment. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. The lyrics are in German, and the music includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A red box highlights a specific passage in the vocal staves, and a red arrow points to a specific note in the piano accompaniment. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, and 20II indicated. The page number 2 is at the bottom.

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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 **B** 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. Corno I, II

Ritornello motive b.

Ritornello motive c.

G major G7

29 C major C7 A7

31II Corno I, II

D minor G7

3

Detailed description: This image shows a page of musical notation for J.S. Bach's Church Cantata BWV 91. It includes vocal staves with lyrics in German and a piano accompaniment. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 23, 26, 29, and 31II indicated. Various musical features are highlighted with colored boxes and labels: a red box around measures 26-27 highlights parallel motion in sweet thirds; a blue box around measures 28-29 highlights Ritornello motive b; a green box around measures 30-31 highlights Ritornello motive c. The piano part features complex chordal textures and polyphonic passages. The key signature changes from G major to C major and then to D minor. The page number 3 is at the bottom.

In the center of this movement's symmetrical structure is chorale line 3, "the only line in which the lower parts participate in the substance of the chorale." See Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, p. 96. Ending with a chordal repetition of "das ist wahr" ("this is true"), the line is given special treatment and emphasis because it represents a central confession of faith regarding the Incarnation (see Petzoldt, *Bach-Kommentar* 2:102–103).

Line 3. Chorale line with accompanying lines having opening notes in diminution, imitative; chordal codetta of confirmation ("das ist wahr").

34. von ei - ner Jung - frau,

von ei - ner Jung - frau, das ist wahr, von ei - ner

von ei - ner Jung - frau, das ist wahr, von ei - ner

Beginning of chorale phrase 3 in diminution.

von ei - ner Jung - frau,

C major (D7) G major D major

37. das ist wahr, Text painting codetta: Chordal repeat (2x) of "this is true" for emphasis/agreement.

von ei - ner Jung - frau, das ist wahr, das ist wahr,

Jung - frau, das ist wahr, das ist wahr, das ist wahr,

das ist wahr, das ist wahr, das ist wahr, das ist wahr,

Ritornello motive b (step-wise descent) illustrates the descent of the Son of God (referenced earlier). (Obs)

Ritornello

D major D7 G major

40. Corni...

G major E7

42II Corni...

A major A7

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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 circulatio." Here the reference is to the rejoicing of angels, reflecting the Gospel reading. In movement 5 humans are added to the angel choir.

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

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

45. 46. 47.

dess freu - et sich der

8

dess freu

dess freu

D

48. 49. 50.

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

8

et sich der En - gel Schar, der Engel

et sich der En - gel Schar, der Engel

et sich der En - gel Schar, der Engel

Ritornello

Str

Obs

B7

E minor G major G major A7 D major

51. 52. 53.

Schar.

8

Schar.

Schar.

Schar.

D major D7 G major

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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 -

E

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

Ob I Ritornello motive a. Ob II

Ob III

Vln I

59 C minor G major

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

leis!

leis!

leis!

Vln II (up 8va)

G major Vla (up 8va) Continuo

Ritornello

G7 Corni...

62

E7 A minor D7

64 II

G major D7

67

G major G major

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

For biblical background, see note.

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

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

D# dim.7

B7

D# dim.7

5

Choral

Chorale Stanza 2 (phrase 1); melodic line 1 three times in diminution in the continuo (probably alluding to the Trinity).

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

Right hand is editorial realization. NBA: einigs

Recit.

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

E minor G major G7 A minor A minor A7

See full score for the correct octave.

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.

NBA: *itzt*
boren, **jetzt** man in der Krippe find't. **Recit.** 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. 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.

3. Aria

Tenor 91/3.

Ambiguity of meter (2/4 vs. 3/4) may symbolize the dual divine-human nature of Christ vs. the Trinity (alluded to in the text). See Petzoldt, "Bach-Kommentar" 2:104.

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

Ritornello derived from vocal line.

A minor.

A7

D minor

A minor

A minor

"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).

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.

Gott, dem der Er-den-kreis zu klein, too small

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

Also note the high tessitura of Oboe I.

A minor

A minor

A7

Word painting: Rising melisma for "heaven."

For biblical background see note.

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

Ritornello

D minor E7.

A minor

A minor

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

Gott, dem der Er-den-

A minor

A7

D major

B minor

kreis zu klein, den we-der Welt noch Him-mel fas-sen, will in der en-

B minor

B7

E minor

C major

(B7)

E minor

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 Erscheinet uns dies

B

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 Kinder has-sen.

Ob I

f Ritornello

C major D7 G major G major

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44

8

C

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

D

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, *p*

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. *f* *Ritornello*

A minor A7 D minor

82
A minor A minor A minor

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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.

For biblical background, see note.



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

Strings

D major E D7 C# G major

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

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

NBA: kömmt

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

A major D major D7 G# dim.7

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

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

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

Via has parallel 5ths.

Adagio

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

mer-tal zu-füh-ren.

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

Harmonic clashes

Parallel 5ths between singer & viola.

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



For the significance of C, see side note.

This type of aria is called a "Devisenarie" (a term coined by Hugo Riemann) or "motto-aria." After the ritornello 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.

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.

5. Aria (Duetto)

(Based on Chorale Verse 6)

● Incarnation: Christ became poor so we might be rich (91/5).

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 , -

For biblical background, see note.

A minor

E minor (B7) E minor

E minor

E minor

mut ,so Gott auf sich nimmt,

die Ar - - mut ,
Dissonant suspension for "poverty."

so Gott auf sich nimmt,

die Ar -

Ritornello

E minor

E minor

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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11 Word painting: Long melismas for "eternal."

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 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 ,

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

Ritornello Majestic processional figure... Dissonant suspension for "poverty."

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

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.

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).

Majestic processional figure...

E minor A minor D7 G major E7

38II

Ascending chromatic fourth. A minor

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

euch den Engels-Herr - lichkei - ten

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

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 mensch - lich Wesen

Sein mensch - lich We - sen

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

G minor

Ritornello

G minor

gels - Herr - lich - kei - ten gleich;

En - gels - Herrlich - kei - ten gleich;

Sweet parallel 6ths for "like the glory of the angels." "Mezzo circulo" (see note at no. 1).

Ritornello Majestic processional figure

G7 C minor G7 C minor

sein mensch - lich We - sen

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

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 circulatorio" 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

For biblical background, see note.

Corno I
Corno II
Timpani

Continuo
Fagotto
Organo

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

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

E - wig - keit. Ky - rie - e 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

G7 C major

C major D7

G major

G major

A7 D major

D7 G major

G major

G major

NBA syllable division

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