

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

Form: Chorus/fantasia - Aria (T) - Recit (A) - Aria (B) - Recit (S) - Choral. 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.

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NBA I/3; BC A13

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

\*Titus 3:4-7 (The mercy of God appeared in Christ)

\*Luke 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)

Matthew 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. This cantata is part of Bach's chorale cantata cycle (see note).

J.S. Bach

## Cantata No. 121

### 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.

(Coro.)

121/1. (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.



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.

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.

Chorale Line 1 (T-A-B-S).

Christ Je - sus praise we ev'-ry one, we praise Him

Chri - Christ

E minor B minor B minor

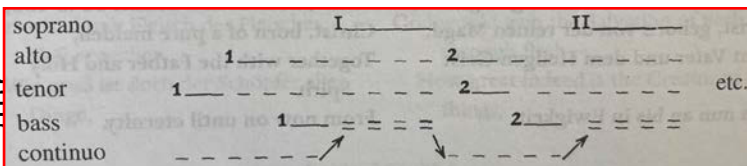


Diagram of movement 1 by Alfred Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, revised and translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 112. Martin Petzoldt suggests that Bach's structural emphasis on 4 (4 chorale phrases, a texture that never exceeds 4 lines) symbolizes the created world and alludes to the first lines of the Latin hymn, which—an exhortation to sing praises to the ends of the earth (see above for text and translation). See Petzoldt, *Bach-Kommentar* 2:162.

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

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

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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  
one, Christ Je - sus praise we, we praise Him ev' -

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

26

A

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

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

ben schon, der rei  
ry - one, the Vir

ben schon,  
ry - one,

A

B minor B minor D7 E minor N6

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31

Magd Ma - ri - en Sohn, der rei nen 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 A7 D major D major D7

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

41.

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

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

Magd, \_\_\_\_\_ der rei nen 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 \_\_\_\_\_

B

G major D major D major



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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 die lie be Son  
far as rays of sun

die lie be Son  
as rays of sun

leucht't, so weit die lie be Son ne  
tend, as far 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

69

ne leucht't  
ex - tend

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

leucht't, so weit, so weit die  
tend, as far, as far as

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

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

74

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

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

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

E minor E minor B7



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78 **C**

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,

**C**

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

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

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, 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

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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  
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," revised and translated by

## Aria.

Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 113.

(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.

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

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 (even emphasizing the normally weak syllable in "begriffe") 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 er.höh - te Kre - a -  
 Thou man whom God cre - a - ted can - not - creature,  
 O thou by God exalted

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 - grei - fe nicht, nein, nein, be - wund're -  
 nor un - 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.

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

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

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

Ritornello

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

37

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

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

*mf* Ritornello

47

50

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

B minor B minor D major

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

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

62

A major F# minor F# minor

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Lines 4-6.

65

Wie gross ist doch der Schöp - fer al - ler Din - ge, und wie bist du ver.  
 He, who from cha - os hath the world e - rec - ted, al - though Thou be des -

F# minor B7 E minor

69

Chromaticism for "verachtet" (despised). Word painting: Melisma for "'retten" (save/rescue).

ach - tet und ge - rin - ge, um dich dadurch zu ret -  
 pised and once re - jec - ted, thee, too, in - deed can res

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

73

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

- ten vom Ver - der - ben, um dich zu - ret - - - - ten,  
 - cue from dam - na - tion, thee, too, can - res - - - - cue,

(B7) E minor E minor A minor

76

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

um dich zu - ret - - - - ten. um dich dadurch zu  
 thee, too, can - res - - - - cue, thee, too, in - deed can

D major D7 E minor D7

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

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).

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

Chromatic saturation  
in the vocal part in  
10 mm.

3 G G#

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 to 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.

9

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*, revised and translated by Richard Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 113.

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

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

For Alfred Dürr's comments, see side note.

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.

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

The 4th movement "is characterized by a clear harmonic structure in connection with a predominantly diatonically shaped melodic line. The instrumental prelude is in two sections. It supplies the thematic material which, in manifold variations of shape, determines in particular the da capo section of the aria; however, this also appears—alongside new motives—in the second section. The multifaceted combination of fragments of subjects and motives creates the impression of a sophisticated and ingenious simplicity. See *Johann Sebastian Bach. The Sacred Vocal Music Complete Edition. Cantatas* (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2017), vol. 11, p. 356 (Frieder Remp, translated by David Kosviner).

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

Syncopation

G7 C major C major C7 F major C major G7

Basso. Jo - han - nis freu - den - vol - les Sprin -

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.

Then John, \_\_\_\_\_ in joy - - ful wel - come spring -

C major

C major

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23 *mf*

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

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

25 Patter diction suggests the galant style.

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 -

G major

27

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 -

Ritornello

G major

29

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 -

G major G major

31<sup>II</sup>

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 -

G major

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

34

Jo-han-nis freu-  
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

den-vol-les Sprin-gen,  
ful-wel-come spring-ing,

Jo-han-nis  
then John, in

A minor (G7) C major



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

*p*

C major

57

*f*

C major D7 G major

59

G major

61

G major G7 C major C7 F major G7 C major

Syncopation

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

# 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 - will mein Her - ze von - der - Welt zu  
 ly - ing, my - heart would leap to Him a - gain and

E(7) A minor

C major

80II

dei\_ner Krip - pe brünstig drin - gen;  
 has-ten to His cra - dle sing - ing;

*mf*

A minor A7 D(7) E(7)

Syncopation (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 deiner 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



# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 121

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

G major

"Welt" (world) is colored with a dim. 7 chord, 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).

1. Soprano.

Doch wie er blickt es dich in deiner Krippe? Es  
Ah! but to see Thee ly - ing in Thy cra - dle! My

Original: Krippen

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.

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

3

seufzt mein Herz: mit bebender und fast geschlossener Lippe bringtes ein dankend Opfer  
heart beats fast; with si - lent trem - bling lips I kneel be - fore Thee in love and a - do - ra - tion

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 me - ni - al es - tate. 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#.

D# Tritone Tritone

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.

weil er die - ses uns zu gut ge - than, so lass' ich mit der En - gel  
since He has thus done so much for us, let us then with the An - gel

C#

E7 A major A7

There is ambiguity about the reading of this text line. See side note.

Chö-ren ein jauch - zend Lob-und Danklied hö - ren.  
Cho - rus, give hear - ty thanks and praise so - no - rous.

A#

Word painting: Arpeggio to highest note for "jubilant."

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.

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).

121/6. 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 reinen  
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 reinen  
In thank-ful praise sing ev' - ry one to Christ the Vir - gin Ma - ry's

E minor B major D major

6

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

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 -

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 -

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

12

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

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

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.

G major F#7 B minor D major F# major