THE BACH EXPERIENCE

The thirty-first cantata performed during the Interdenominational Protestant Worship Service

This program is an insert to your worship bulletin.

Johann Sebastian BACH
(1685-1750)

Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin, BWV 125

Douglas Dodson, countertenor
Patrick T. Waters, tenor
Joseph Hubbard, bass

Jessica Lizak, flute
Elizabeth England, oboe d’amore
Heidi Braun-Hill, violin
Rose Drucker, violin

MARSH CHAPEL CHOIR AND COLLEGIUM

SCOTT ALLEN JARRETT CONDUCTING

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J. S. BACH Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin, BWV 125

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Eisenach on 21 March 1685 and died in Leipzig on 28 July 1750. He composed hundreds of cantatas for both sacred and secular purposes, over 200 of which survive. This is the thirty-first cantata performed by the Marsh Chapel Choir and Collegium as part of The Bach Experience.

Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin was first performed on 2 February 1725 for the Feast of the Purification of Mary (Candlemas). It is scored for ATB soloists, SATB chorus, flauto traverso, oboe d'amore, horn, strings, and continuo. Its duration is approximately 24 minutes.

This third cantata of Marsh Chapel’s Bach Experience continues the overarching theme of arrivals that permeate the four cantatas this season: in the fall, we celebrated the birthday of John the Baptist and the Ascension of Mary; in April, we will celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This morning features Bach’s Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin BWV125, composed for the Feast of the Purification and first performed on 2 February 1725. The Purification commemorates Mary’s return to the Temple forty days after giving birth to Jesus in accordance with Mosaic law; the sense of Jesus’ arrival is crystallized, however, by the words of Simeon, whose prophecy of death soon after meeting the Messiah has remained one of the most enduring poetic and musical texts in all of Christianity. Those words, also known by their Latin incipit Nunc dimittis, are set here by Bach in a combination of Martin Luther’s chorale translation and an anonymous libretto’s extrapolation of the corresponding chorale verses’ themes, a technique we have seen in the other chorale cantatas.

The Song of Simeon holds particular poignancy for the eighteenth-century Lutheran. In Simeon’s prophecy, Scripture delivers the first instance of salvation in death, through Christ. Indeed, the libretto taken as a whole exegeses on Reform theology: not just death as a gateway to new life, a common theme in many of Bach’s cantata libretti, but also on the sola of Reform theology: salvation through Scripture (“Es schallet kräftig fort und fort/Ein höchst erwünscht Verheißungswort”, “There goes on and on sounding powerfully/A most highly desired word of promise” (no. 4)), through faith (“Wer glaubt, soll selig warden,” “Whoever believes shall be saved” (no. 4)), and through grace (“Es wird der Welt...Ein Stuhl der Gnaden/Und Siegeszeichen aufgestellt,” “For the world...A seat of grace/And sign of victory is set up” (no. 5)), alone. Simeon, at the end of his life, recognized Christ as the Messiah, and meets the end of his earthly life in gladness with the promise of salvation in His name. The libretto characteristically places the believer at the heart of this story and its promise, particularly in the first aria for alto, in which the believer is explicitly described in Simeon’s position, in both mind, spirit, and body: “Wenn gleich des Leibes Bau zerfällt/Doch fällt mein Herz und Hoffen nicht./Mein Jesus sieht auf mich Sterben/Und lässet mir kein Leid geschehn.” (“Though the body’s frame collapses,/Yet my heart and hope do not fail./My Jesus looks upon me in dying/And lets no hurt befall me.”)

The libretto only gets us started, of course, and we haven’t even begun to talk about Bach and this exceptional piece of his creative output. As part of the chorale cantata cycle, Bach based this cantata upon
Luther’s chorale version of the *Nunc dimittis*, for which he also wrote the tune. The opening chorus places the chorale in long notes in the soprano (reinforced by a horn), while the obbligato instruments and other voices provide free contrapuntal elaboration. The humility and somber joy of the text are conveyed by the mellow colors of the transverse flute and oboe d’amore; flowing step- and third-wise melodic lines are balanced by leaping octaves and fifths that pervade the movement’s dancelike 12/8 meter. The movement proceeds rather typically of Bach’s cantata chorale choruses, but for a stunning moment of pause at “Sanft und stille” (“meek and quiet”), where Bach troubled to mark piano and at which the flowing motives slow to long notes in almost all voices and instruments; momentum is revived by declaratory statements of “wie Gott” (“As God”), marked forte. The last phrase of the chorale returns to piano for a homophonic statement of “der Tod ist mein Schlaf” (“Death has become my sleep”), before the movement closes with the opening instrumental ritornello.

The first aria, for alto, is in many ways the heart of the cantata, even though it comes close to the beginning. It is by far the longest movement, and as mentioned above, the text squarely places the believer in the place of Simeon at the Temple. Flute, oboe, and alto participate in a concertante trio over a pulsating continuo; the melodic lines are florid, weaving, and richly ornamented. The ritornelli primarily utilize motion by parallel thirds, which devolves into more polyphonic activity rich in suspensions and appoggiaturas while the alto sings. The aria’s length owes little to the libretto, and instead to Bach’s rich music and frequent text repetition. One senses that Bach wished us to dwell on the intimacy of this aria’s text, musically and temporally.

The first recitative of the cantata combines the music and text of Luther’s chorale with free poetic and musical extrapolation; here, the listener, Luther, and Scripture are united across time and space into one smoothly continuous piece of sung poetry. The text steps back from the intimacy of the preceding aria; indeed, it almost stands in awe of the feelings there expressed: “O Wunder, daß ein Herz...verhaßten Gruft...Sich nicht entsetzet!” (“O wonder, that a heart...before the tomb...should not be frightened!”) The staid poetry of Luther’s translation, sung in regular quarter notes in a marked Andante tempo, provides a structure around which the believer’s own feelings and commentary are expressed in the “freer” (freer-sounding, at least; the textual rhythm is carefully notated by Bach!) speech-like patterns of recitative; the jumping string parts provide musical continuity across the shifts in style. The recitative pivots away from personal experience to the more cosmic, universal implications of Simeon’s story that pervade the cantata’s remaining movements.

Following the recitative is a duet for tenor and bass, always a treat in Bach’s hands. Alfred Dürr describes this movement as a “thematicall unified quintet”; the listener will note that the violins, singers, and continuo all alternate in starting the same sequence of motives: an ascending scale, followed by dotted figures, and concluded by sequential sixteenth-note figures that any regular listener of Bach’s music will find familiar. That the same musical material is shared by all participants of this aria may reflect the text’s emphasis on the universal salvation for all believers of the word; even those who do not believe are included, as the “Licht erfüllt/Den ganzen Kreis der Erden” (“Light fills/the entire circle of the earth”). The ultimate point of the aria’s text – universal salvation – is driven home by a rhetorical Adagio at the singers’ final cadence. The cantata then concludes with a short secco recitative which prepares the final four-part chorale, where the lesson of Simeon for all believers is summarized in straight poetry, first by the anonymous librettist, and then by Luther himself.

—Brett Kostrzewski, February 2017
Text and Translation

I. Chorus

Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin
In Gottes Willen,
Getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn,
Sanft und stille.
Wie Gott mir verheimen hat:
Der Tod ist mein Schlaf worden.

With peace and joy I depart
in God’s will,
My heart and mind are comforted,
calm, and quiet
As God had promised me:
death has become my sleep.

II. Aria (A)

Ich will auch mit gebrochenen Augen
Nach dir, mein treuer Heiland, sehn.
Wennleich des Leibes Bau zerbricht,
Doch fällt mein Herz und Hoffen nicht.
Mein Jesus sieht auf mich im Sterben
Und lässet mir kein Leid geschehn.

Even with broken eyes,
I will look for You, my loving Savior.
Even if my body’s frame be destroyed,
yet my heart and hope will not fall.
My Jesus looks on me in death
and allows no pain to befall me.

III. Recitative and Chorale (B)

O Wunder, daß ein Herz
Vor der dem Fleisch verhaßten Gruft
und gar des Todes Schmerz
Sich nicht entsetzet!
Das macht Christus, wahr’ Gottes Sohn,
Der treue Heiland,
Der auf dem Sterbebette schon
Mit Himmelssüßigkeit den Geist ergötzet,
Den du mich, Herr, hast sehen lan,
Da in erfüllter Zeit ein Glaubensarm
das Heil des Herrn umfinge;
Und machtz bekannt
Von dem erhabnen Gott,
dem Schöpfer aller Dinge,
Daß er sei das Leben und Heil,
Der Menschen Trost und Teil,
Ihr Retter vom Verderben
Im Tod und auch im Sterben.

O wonder, that a heart
before the flesh-abhorred tomb,
and even the pain of death
does not recoil!
Christ, God’s true son, does this,
the loving Savior,
Who even at the deathbed
delights the spirit with the sweetness of heaven,
whom You, Lord, have allowed me to see,
so that in the fullness of time
an arm of faith might
seize the salvation of the Lord;
and have made it known
of the exalted God, the Creator of all things,
that he is life and salvation
the comfort and portion of humanity,
their Redeemer from corruption
in death and also in dying.
IV. Duet (TB)

Ein unbegreiflich Licht
erfüllt den ganzen Kreis der Erden.
Es schallet kräftig fort und fort
Ein höchst erwünscht Verheißungswort:
Wer glaubt, soll selig werden. (da capo)

V. Recitative (A)

O unerschöpfter Schatz der Güte,
So sich uns Menschen aufgetan:
es wird der Welt,
So Zorn und Fluch auf sich geladen,
Ein Stuhl der Gnaden
Und Siegeszeichen aufgestellt,
Und jedes gläubige Gemüte
Wird in sein Gnadenreich geladen.

VI. Chorale

Er ist das Heil und selig Licht
Für die Heiden,
Zu erleuchten, die dich kennen nicht,
Und zu weiden.
Er ist deins Volks Israel
Der Preis, Ehr, Freud, und Wonne.

An unfathomable light
fills the entire orb of the earth.
Ringing powerfully through and through
is the most highly desired assurance:
whoever believes shall be blessed. (da capo)

O uncreated hoard of goodness,
opened thus for humanity:
the world,
laden as it is with anger and curses,
shall become a seat of grace
and be planted with the banner of victory,
and every faithful conscience
will be invited into His kingdom of grace.

He is the salvation and the blessed light
of the heathens
to enlighten those who know You not,
and to nurture them.
He is, for Your people Israel,
praise, honor, joy, and delight.

Translation: Pamela Dellal
**Sopranos**
Heather Bachelder, Palmer, AK
Elizabeth Crozier, Boston, MA
Xing Hu, Chengdu, China
Annette Jochum, Durham, NC
MaryRuth Lown, West Columbia, SC
Phoebe Oler, Boston, MA
Katie Quigley Mellor, Boston, MA
Emily Regier, Belmont, MA
Erin Sanborn, Wakefield, MA
Kasey Shultz, Seattle, WA
Carey Shunskis, Upper Darby, PA
Sharon Solomon, Marietta, GA
Jacquelyn Stucker, Jamaica Plain, MA
Margaret Weckworth, Greensboro, NC

**Tenors**
Ethan Depuy, Rochester, NY
Steven Merrill, Wausau, WI
George Silvis, III, Cambridge, MA
Patrick T. Waters, Guilford, CT
Sean Watland, Chicago, IL

**Altos**
Candace Brooks, Branford, CT
Meredith Cler, Ripon, WI
Douglas Dodson, Spearfish, SD
Elizabeth Eschen, Cazenovia, NY
Maddy Frumkin, Charlotte, NC
Kira Garvie, Ghent, NY
Kim Leeds, Watertown, MA
Kimi Macdonald, Londonderry, NH
Katie Moore, Moorestown, NJ
Nellie Morley, Nantucket, MA
Britt Simonson, Okemos, MI

**Basses**
David Ames, Newton Centre, MA
Junhan Choi, South Korea
Daniel Fallu, Goffstown, NH
Alex Handin, Guilderland, NY
Samuel Horsch, Gibson City, IL
Joseph Hubbard, Pflugerville, TX
Kevin Neel, Charlotte, NC
Steve Pinner, Hudson, MA
Matt Reese, Langhorne, PA
Tim Sullivan, Somerville, MA

*Choral Scholar*
MARSH CHAPEL COLLEGIUM

Violin I
Heidi Braun-Hill, concertmaster
Sean Larkin
Nelli Herskovits-Jabotinsky

Violin II
Rose Drucker
Kay Rooney Matthews
Emily Dahl Irons

Viola
Daniel Doña
Merrick Nelson

Cello
Guy Fishman

Contrabass
Nathan Varga

Horn
Elisabeth Axtell

Organ
Justin Blackwell

Managers
Margaret Weckworth
Phoebe Oler

Oboe/Oboe d’amore
Elizabeth England

PREVIOUS BACH CANTATA PERFORMANCES

Performed during the Sunday morning Interdenominational Protestant Worship Service.

BWV 1: Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern (2/8/15)
BWV 4: Christ lag in Todesbanden (4/17/16)
BWV 6: Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend werden (11/15/15)
BWV 7: Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam (9/25/16)
BWV 10: Meine Seele erhebt den Herren (11/20/16)
BWV 29: Wir danken dir, Gott (9/28/08)
BWV 31: Der Himmel lacht! Die Erde jubilieret (2/7/16)
BWV 34: O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe (9/26/10)
BWV 39: Brich dem Hungrigen dein Brot (1/31/10)
BWV 61: Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland (12/2/07)
BWV 62: Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland (12/12/10)
BWV 66: Erfreut euch, ihr Herzen (9/27/15)
BWV 67: Halt im Gedächtnis Jesum Christ (4/6/08; 4/12/15)
BWV 70: Wachtet! Betet! Betet! Wachet! (11/22/09)
BWV 71: Gott ist mein König (9/30/12)

BWV 2: Alles nur nach Gottes Willen (1/27/08)
BWV 72: Du sollt Gott, deinen Herren, lieben (2/10/13)
BWV 77: Jesu der du meine Seele (11/9/14)
BWV 79: Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild (2/19/12)
BWV 105: Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht (11/6/11)
BWV 106: Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (10/28/07)
BWV 111: Was mein Gott will, das g’scheh allzeit (1/25/09)
BWV 131: Aus der Tiefen rufe ich, Herr, zu dir (9/27/09)
BWV 140: Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme (12/2/12)
BWV 147: Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben (11/23/08)
BWV 148: Bringet dem Herrn Ehre seinen Namens (4/26/09)
BWV 149: Man singet mit Freuden vom Seig (9/25/11)
BWV 171: Gott, wie dein Name, so ist auch dein Ruhm (1/30/11)
BWV 172: Erschallet, ihr Lieder, erklunget, ihr Saiten! (4/29/12)
BWV 190: Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied (9/28/14)
BOSTON UNIVERSITY Marsh Chapel

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Dean and Chaplain of the University

Br. Lawrence A. Whitney, LC+
University Chaplain for Community Life

Jessica Chicka
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Ray Bouchard
Director of Marsh Chapel

Scott Allen Jarrett, DMA
Director of Music

Justin Thomas Blackwell
Associate Director of Music

Heidi Freinamis-Cordts
Director of Hospitality

Marsh Chapel
735 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA  02215

617.353.3560
www.bu.edu/chapel