

Marsh Chapel at Boston University

THE BACH EXPERIENCE



Listeners' Companion
2019 | 2020

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Notes by

Brett Kostrzewski

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Cantatas for the New Year

Brett Kostrzewski

In contemporary society, New Year's Eve and Day occasion two familiar thought processes: reflection of the year that has passed, and hopes for the year to come. For practicing Christians, the New Year's holiday remains inextricably linked with the feast of Christmas one week before. In fact, even in secular terms, our "holiday season" implies an association between Christmas and New Year's—an association that can never be fully obscured as long as we rely upon the Gregorian calendar.

The liturgical Christmas season traditionally lasts for two weeks; the first of January, when the calendar year changes, sits in the middle of this season. For Bach, that day commemorated the Circumcision of Jesus, upon which he formally received his name and entered the community of Jewish believers. It was an important feast; Bach would compose two cantatas beyond the two that were part of his complete cycles, in addition to the cantatas needed for the Sunday after Christmas itself.

This year's Bach Experience features four cantatas related to the New Year: three for New Year's Day (the Feast of the Circumcision) and one for the Sunday after Christmas, which that year fell on 30 December and inevitably carried with it the connotation of the New Year. All four librettos—each composed by a different poet—focus especially on the theme of both praise and thanksgiving for the year that has past, as well as prayers for God's protection in the year to come.

In his seminal book *The Cantatas of J.S. Bach* (an essential reference for your author), the great scholar Alfred Dürr comments that the New Year's cantatas do not focus on the Scripture readings that were assigned to these two liturgies. It is true that the Gospel for New Year's Day—the literal telling of Jesus' circumcision—does not factor at all into the librettos of any of these cantatas. But the assigned reading is a mere single verse, short enough to reproduce here (from the NIV): "On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived." (Luke 2:21)

But the Epistle to the Galatians, excerpts of which were also read on New Year's Day and the Sunday after Christmas, point toward an equally important element of the Feast of the Circumcision—an element only more strongly accentuated by the changing of the calendar year that took place on 1 January (at least since the Gregorian calendar reform promulgated in 1582, although not adopted in Bach's Germany until 1700). The entire Epistle was written by St. Paul to address the question of Gentile converts to Christianity and the application of the Mosaic Law—circumcision being one such question. As St. Paul wrote, and as Bach's listeners would have heard on 1 January, "Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. . . . Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian." (Galatians 3:23, 25) Similarly, on the Sunday after Christmas: "So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are His child, God has made you also an heir." (4:7) This dichotomy of

law and Gospel would be repurposed by Martin Luther in his rejection of the Roman Church (and Jews themselves, for that matter), adding another layer of significance to these lines for Bach and his congregation.

It becomes clear from these readings that the focus of the Feast of the Circumcision and the week after Christmas is not the literal event of Christ's naming, as important an event that was. Rather, it is the act of renewal effected by the naming: from slave to heir, from law to Gospel. The New Year becomes a symbol for the renewal effected upon all Christians since the Incarnation, made personal in their baptism. Returning to Dürr, I therefore disagree with his suggestion that the cantata texts avoid the sentiment of the relevant Scripture readings. All of them are directly concerned with the New Year—reflection on the old, anticipation of the new, ensconced in Christian faith and trust.

August 2019
Boston

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Law and Gospel in Martin Luther's Theology

Dr. Jessica Chicka

The distinction between Law and Gospel is the central issue of theology for Martin Luther. Luther's theology differs from many theologians that preceded and followed him in that his theological claims did not focus on one central idea alone, but the dynamic active relationship which creates a dialectic between these two concepts. The law is that which binds humanity to one another and makes individuals subject to judgment while the gospel frees humanity from its bondage. The law orders and grounds the sinful human-ness of the person, while the gospel aspires to divine hope and love.

The active determination between law and gospel is the ground upon which all of Luther's theology is built, including justification by faith and the assertion of *sola scriptura*. The Christian exists within the tension created by these two antithetical, but complementary ideas—determining what is “Law” and what is “Gospel” and how they relate to one another. Law and Gospel are in a dialectical relationship, one informing the other to the point that neither can truly exist without the information of the other. It is the role of the Christian to continuously evaluate and re-evaluate the relationship between the law and the gospel in order to function in the world. This call is a difficult one to answer however, because the terms continuously change and/or are hidden from full comprehension. Laws are temporal, contextual, malleable to the human situation and never fully perfected; the Gospel is eternal, divine, and never fully conceivable.

In his commentary on Galatians, Luther describes the relationship between the Law and Gospel in the life of the Christian:

Therefore the Christian is divided this way into two times. To the extent that he is flesh, he is under the Law; to the extent that he is spirit, he is under the Gospel...the time of the Law is not forever; but it has an end, which is Christ. But the time of grace is forever; for Christ, having died once for all, will never die again (Rom. 6:9–10). He is eternal; therefore the time of grace is eternal also.¹

Luther separates the Law and Gospel as time-dependent influences on the life of the individual, but his notion of time goes beyond a historical, linear understanding of the life of the person. The Gospel is ever-present and eternal; the Gospel always governs over people's spiritual lives. The Law, conversely, is temporary in that it has an end point, but still affects the decisions and actions of the person in the material world. He describes

¹ Martin Luther, “Chapter 3,” in *Luther's Works*, edited by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, American ed., 26 *Lectures on Galatians 1535, Chapters 1–4* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 342.

the Law as external to, but still having an effect on the body, and the Gospel as internal, driving the conscience of the person. For Luther, humanity is caught between two realms—the earthly realm and the realm of God. Human experience is found in the intersecting space of these two realms. The difficulty of these realms is that they do not perfectly align with each other, nor are they completely separate. Luther recognizes a connection and tension between life as people experience it in this world and the eternal realm of God. Christians do not take on dual and separate relationships with God and the world, but rather these relationships are unified and come to define who they are.

September 2019
Boston

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September 29, 2019

Jesu, nun sei gepreiset BWV 41

Johann Sebastian Bach.

Cantata for New Year's Day (The Feast of the Circumcision)

Epistle: Galatians 3:23–29

Gospel: Luke 2:21

First performed: 1 January 1725

Forces: SATB chorus, SATB solos, three oboes, three trumpets, timpani, violincello piccolo (performed today on the modern cello), strings, and continuo

Johann Sebastian Bach composed the cantata *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset* BWV 41 for 1 January 1725, his second Feast of the Circumcision since arriving in Leipzig in the summer of 1723. The cantata therefore forms part of his second complete annual cycle, the “chorale cantatas,” which draw their librettos and musical material entirely from the Lutheran chorale repertoire. While many of these cantatas share elements of their structure and deployment of the chorale, as a corpus they display the seemingly endless creativity in Bach’s various implementations of their preexisting music. *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset* represents one of Bach’s most daring chorale cantatas—no doubt due to a conflation of the feast’s importance, the chorale’s length, and—paradoxically—the tune’s simplicity which invited a wide variety of combinations.

The Feast of the Circumcision represents the midway point of the Christmas season, equidistant between Christmas itself and the Feast of the Epiphany which ends the season. Bach commemorated the feast in this particular cantata with the festive ensemble including trumpets and timpani as well as a choir of three oboes; the oboes are used to special effect in the soprano aria that follows the opening chorus. The three-verse chorale by Johannes Herman—quoted word-for-word in the opening chorus and closing chorale, the middle verse glossed throughout the internal movements—situates the believer and his or her hope for salvation at the beginning of a new year. Indeed, one detects a sense of New Year’s wishes in the modern sense: gratitude for the previous year, a request for blessings in the year to come, and an overall trust and devotion to God after this annual commemoration of the Incarnation.

The opening chorus stands as one of the grandest and most elaborate opening movements among the chorale cantatas. The movement is essentially a set of alternations between ritornello and chorale verse statement; after its introduction, with the oft-repeated and memorable trumpet fanfare, the soprano enters with the chorale in long notes, surrounded by free polyphony in the other voices. Bach’s setting of the first four lines

is repeated exactly, ritornello and all, for the following four lines. After the conclusion of what feels like a complete chorus, however, Bach inserts a dramatic contrast on the text “Daß wir in gutter Stille” (“that we in prosperous peace”): a triple-time section marked *adagio*, during which the basses sustain a pedal “Stille” over flowing lines in the oboes and trumpets. After these two lines, a strict *colla parte* fugue marked *presto* sets the remaining four lines, still with the chorale in long notes for the soprano hovering over the fugue. Bach surprises us still by “plugging in” to the opening trumpet-ritornello material for a repetition of the first two lines—a repetition that must have been local practice, as it occurs in the several other settings of this same chorale written by Bach. Bach therefore packs into this straightforward (albeit long) chorale a complex structure (not to mention its spectacular music), responding simultaneously to the needs of the text, the form of the chorale, and the rhetorical requirements of a ritornello-chorus.

Bach favored accompanying soprano arias with the oboe; in the first aria of this cantata, he utilizes an entire oboe choir for a striking, almost vocal texture. The text of this straightforward da capo aria prays for a year filled with an “abundance of blessings”; Bach uses a dancelike 6/8 meter with a beautiful lilting melody that moves between the oboes and the soprano. After this prayer for blessings, a secco recitative for alto carries with it the understanding that, should hard times befall the believer this coming year, the believer continues to trust in God’s eternal promise.

The recitative transitions to the much more somber aria for tenor and cello piccolo, a recently-invented instrument in Bach’s day that fell somewhere between the viola and the cello in size and timbre. The aria requests mercy and salvation upon the believer’s death, stating the Christian maxim that, should one be prepared for death in Christ, one is assured a blessed life on earth. The searching cello part includes broad arpeggio gestures that often span more than two octaves in a single sweep of the bow; within this melody, Bach interweaves the smooth tenor line filled with “sighing” figures of descending pairs of notes. Despite the length of the text in the aria’s B section, Bach only assigns it about one-third as much music as the A section.

The following recitative for bass is essentially secco but for a striking accompaniment of one phrase by the other three vocal parts; the bass jumps up a diminished fifth for the word “Satan,” at which point the soprano, alto, and tenor enter on a fully-inverted seventh chord that lasts for more than two full measures; this particular phrase is drawn from the German litany, no doubt the reason for Bach’s calling attention to it in this way. The recitative asks for protection from the Enemy, through which the believer can live out the year in Christ.

The final chorale is one of Bach’s heavily embellished four-part settings. The voices merely state the chorale in a rich but straightforward homophonic harmonization, the oboes and strings doubling the voices as typical; but Bach recalls the structure of his grand opening chorus. The statements of the first and last groups of lines are punctuated by the same trumpet fanfare that was featured in the ritornello of the opening chorus, and the third section of the chorale is set in the same 3/4 meter (although this time lacking the tempo marking *adagio*) without trumpets before returning to the square, duple conclusion.

I. Chorus

Jesu, nun sei gepreiset
Zu diesem neuen Jahr
Für dein Güt, uns beweiset
In aller Not und G'fahr,
Daß wir haben erlebt
Die neu fröhliche Zeit,
Die voller Gnaden schwebet
Und ewger Seligkeit;
Daß wir in guter Stille
Das alt Jahr habn erfüllet.
Wir wolln uns dir ergeben
Itzund und immerdar,
Behüt Leib, Seel und Leben
Hinfort durchs ganze Jahr!

*Jesus, now be praised
At this New Year,
For Thy goodness shows us
In all our need and peril
That we have witnessed
The new and joyful age,
Full of grace
And eternal bliss;
That we in prosperous peace
Have completed the old year.
We would give ourselves to Thee
Now and evermore,
Protect body, soul, and life
Henceforth through all the year!*

II. Aria (S)

Laß uns, o höchster Gott, das Jahr vollbringen,
Damit das Ende so wie dessen Anfang sei.
Es stehe deine Hand uns bei,
Daß künftig bei des Jahres Schluß
Wir bei des Segens Überfluß
Wie jetzt ein Halleluja singen.

*Let us, O highest God, complete the year,
That it be ended as it was begun.
Let Thy hand protect us,
That when the year has ended
We, overwhelmed with blessing,
May sing, as now, alleluia.*

III. Recitative (A)

Ach! deine Hand, dein Segen muß allein
Das A und O, der Anfang und das Ende sein.
Das Leben trägest du in deiner Hand,
Und unsre Tage sind bei dir geschrieben;
Dein Auge steht auf Stadt und Land;
Du zähltest unser Wohl und kennest unser Leiden,
Ach! gib von beiden,
Was deine Weisheit will,
Worzu dich dein Erbarmen angetrieben.

*Ah, Thy hand, Thy blessing must alone be
The A and O, the beginning and the end.
Thou dost hold our life in Thy hand,
And our days are numbered by Thee;
Thine eye doth watch over town and country;
Thou dost count our weal and know our grief.
Ah! Give of both,
According to Thy wisdom,
And as Thy mercy prompts Thee.*

IV. Aria (T)

Woferne du den edlen Frieden
Für unsern Leib und Stand beschieden,
So laß der Seele doch dein selig machend Wort.
Wenn uns dies Heil begegnet,
So sind wir hier gesegnet
Und Auserwählte dort!

*Just as Thou hast granted noble peace
For our body and state,
So grant my soul Thy beneficent Word.
If this Salvation be ours,
We shall be blessed here
And Thine elected there!*

V. Recitative (B) and Chorus

Doch weil der Feind bei Tag und Nacht
Zu unserm Schaden wacht
Und unsre Ruhe will verstören,
So wollest du, o Herre Gott, erhören,
Wenn wir in heiliger Gemeinde beten:

—Den Satan unter unsre Füße treten.—

So bleiben wir zu deinem Ruhm
Dein auserwähltes Eigentum
Und können auch nach Kreuz und Leiden
Zur Herrlichkeit von hinnen scheiden.

*But since the foe both day and night
Lies awake to harm us
And seeks to destroy our peace,
May it please Thee, O Lord God, to hear us,
When we beg thee, as a holy congregation:*

—To trample Satan beneath our feet.—

*And we shall forever to Thy praise
Belong to Thee as Thine elect,
And shall, after Thy suffering and sorrow,
Depart from here to great glory.*

VI. Chorale

**Dein ist allein die Ehre,
Dein ist allein der Ruhm;
Geduld im Kreuz uns lehre,
Regier all unser Tun,
Bis wir fröhlich abscheiden
Ins ewig Himmelreich,
Zu wahren Fried und Freude,
Den Heiligen Gottes gleich.
Indes mach's mit uns allen
Nach deinem Wohlgefallen:
Solchs singet heut ohn Scherzen
Die christgläubige Schar
Und wünscht mit Mund und Herzen
Ein seligs neues Jahr.**

*Thine alone is the glory,
Thine alone is the praise;
Teach us to bear affliction,
Govern all our deeds,
Till we depart in rapture
Into heaven's eternal realm,
Into true peace and joy,
Even as the saints of God.
Meanwhile, deal with us all
According to Thy pleasure:
Thus in earnest they sing to you today,
The faithful Christian throng,
And wish with voice and spirit
For a blessed new year.*

November 10, 2019

*Gottlob! nun geht
das Jahr zu Ende* BWV 28



Cantata for the Sunday after Christmas Day

Epistle: Galatians 4:1–7

Gospel: Luke 2:33–40

First performed: 30 December 1725

Forces: SATB chorus, SATB solos, two oboes, taille (performed today on the English horn), cornetto, three trombones, strings, and continuo

The first cantata of this year's Bach Experience, *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset* BWV 41, was heard on the first day of the year in 1725; today's cantata, *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende* BWV 28, was heard on 30 December of the same year, on the Sunday after Christmas. By the autumn of 1725, Bach had completed his first two annual cycles of cantatas; he would compose new cantatas only occasionally for the remaining twenty-five years of his tenure in Leipzig. *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende* represents an early such cantata.

For this Sunday, Bach chose a chorale text published in a collection by Erdmann Neumeister, a popular resource for German cantors. Bach's first two cycles draw upon the work of unknown librettists, and by the end of the 1720s, Bach would almost exclusively rely on the Leipzig poet and bureaucrat known as Picander. But Neumeister's cantata texts were widely circulated in Germany, providing poetic texts based on Scripture and chorales that could be set to music for given feast days by the skilled church music composer. This text appropriately commemorates the end of the year in the light of Christmas, otherwise avoiding direct reference to the Epistle and Gospel of the day.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende* is its variety of movements. The cantata begins with an aria rather than the chorus typical of the four-voice cantatas; the aria is followed immediately by an *alla breve* chorale fantasia. Two recitatives, one in an *arioso* style, precede a strophic aria duet; the cantata closes with a plain four-part chorale. The result is a varied and effective meditation on the last Sunday of the year.

The opening aria for soprano features strings and oboe choir; Bach's deployment of these two instrumental groups is particularly interesting here. They function not unlike the "concertists" and "ripienists" of a Baroque choir, in which one group plays all of the notes while the other groups enter to double certain passages for textural effect. Here, the two groups alternate function rapidly. Sometimes, such as at the very opening, the oboes play the figures, to be joined by the violins for just a moment at a time; other times, the opposite occurs. The introduction of the soprano only further complicates the series of exchanges; the voice occasionally participates in the same figures as the instruments, while at other times introduces new music to the preexisting contrapuntal framework. The aria's text is an unabashed song of praise and thanksgiving, set to a minuet-like meter and rhythm.

The chorale fantasia that follows, setting the first verse of Johann Gramann's hymn, is atypical among the cantatas—not just in its position, but in its overall compositional approach. The strict *colla parte* disposition in which the instruments simply double the voices, as well as the antiquarian *alla breve* style of the movement, are not unusual for Bach as a technique but are usually avoided in the chorale movements. In all of these ways, the movement resembles some of Bach's organ preludes on chorale tunes—abstract, freely invented polyphony adorning the audible chorale tune, usually in the highest voice, in the similarly "*colla parte*" texture intrinsic to the instrument. Without instrumental passages to demarcate the lines of the chorale, Bach uses distinctive motivic gestures for each: notice the chromatic ascending line at "Hat dir dein Sünd'" and the quick repeated notes on "errett' dein armes Leben."

Two recitatives follow the chorale. The first, for bass, quotes the Book of Jeremiah; as Bach often did for direct excerpts from Scripture, he set the bass as an "arioso," complete with a tempo indication and a moving bass line that sounds more like an aria than the long, held notes of recitative. The excerpt identifies God's inclination to bless and do good to the believer; the sentiment is then glossed in the recitative for tenor that follows. Here, Bach utilizes the unceasing string "halo" familiar to most listeners from the Jesus recitatives in the *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244.

The recitatives give way to a joyful duet for alto, tenor, and continuo. Bach's duets are always a treat. His skill at motivic interplay and contrapuntal combinations are nowhere better displayed than between two human voices, especially when they are unobscured by any accompanying obbligato instruments. The strophic aria, in keeping with the theme of the libretto, thanks God for the previous year and requests blessings for the year that follows. Bach introduces the main theme of the aria in the ritornello; these seven measures form the basis of the entire aria: transposed to a series of keys, spun out into sequences, decorated with sixteenth-note elaboration, and, ultimately, providing the rounded form with a reprise at the end. A standard four-part setting of a different chorale, Paul Eber's *Helft mir Gotts Güte*, closes the cantata—and the calendar year.

I. Aria (S)

Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende,
Das neue rücket schon heran.
Gedenke, meine Seele, dran,
Wieviel dir deines Gottes Hände
Im alten Jahre Guts getan!
Stimm ihm ein frohes Danklied an;
So wird er ferner dein gedenken
Und mehr zum neuen Jahre schenken.

*Praise God! the year now draws to a close,
The New Year is approaching.
Consider this, O my soul,
The good that God's hands wrought you
In the year now past!
Strike up for Him a joyous song of thanks,
And He will continue to think of you
And grant you more in this New Year.*

II. Chorus

**Nun lob, mein Seel, den Herren,
Was in mir ist, den Namen sein!
Sein Wohltat tut er mehren,
Vergiß es nicht, o Herze mein!
Hat dir dein Sünd vergeben
Und heilt dein Schwachheit groß,
Errett' dein armes Leben,
Nimmt dich in seinen Schoß.
Mit reichem Trost beschüttet,
Verjüngt, dem Adler gleich.
Der Kön'g schafft Recht, behütet,
Die leid'n in seinem Reich.**

*Now praise, my soul, the Lord,
Let all in me now praise His name!
His goodness He increases,
Forget it not, O heart of mine!
Your sins He has forgiven you,
He heals your great weakness,
Saves your wretched life,
Takes you in His embrace.
He pours His blessings on you,
Making you young, like the eagle.
The King is just, and He protects
Those who suffer in His realm.*

III. Recitative and Arioso (B)

So spricht der Herr:
Es soll mir eine Lust sein,
Daß ich ihnen Gutes tun soll,
Und ich will sie in diesem Lande pflanzen treulich,
Von ganzem Herzen und von ganzer Seele.

*Thus saith the Lord:
I will rejoice over them
To do them good,
And I will plant them in this land assuredly
With my whole heart and with my whole soul.*

IV. Recitative (T)

Gott ist ein Quell, wo lauter Güte fließt;
Gott ist ein Licht, wo lauter Gnade scheint;
Gott ist ein Schatz, der lauter Segen heißt;
Gott ist ein Herr, der's treu und herzlich meint.
Wer ihn im Glauben liebt, in Liebe kindlich ehrt,
Sein Wort von Herzen hört
Und sich von bösen Wegen kehrt,
Dem gibt er sich mit allen Gaben.
Wer Gott hat, der muß alles haben.

*God is a spring, where naught but kindness flows;
God is a light, where naught but mercy shines;
God is a treasure, which naught but blessing gives;
God is a Lord with true and kind intent.
Who loves Him in faith, honors Him in childlike love,
Takes His word to heart
And turns from the path of evil,
To him He gives Himself abundantly.
He who has God has everything.*

V. Duet (A, T)

Gott hat uns im heurigen Jahre gesegnet,
Daß Wohltun und Wohlsein einander begegnet.
Wir loben ihn herzlich und bitten darneben,
Er woll auch ein glückliches neues Jahr geben.
Wir hoffen's von seiner beharrlichen Güte
Und preisen's im voraus mit dankbarm Gemüte.

*God has blessed us in the past year,
With good deeds and prosperity alike.
We praise Him from our hearts, and beseech Him
That He may also grant us a happy New Year.
We hope for this of His constant goodness
And praise Him already with thankful hearts.*

VI. Chorale

**All solch dein Güt wir preisen,
Vater ins Himmels Thron,
Die du uns tust beweisen
Durch Christum, deinen Sohn,
Und bitten ferner dich:
Gib uns ein friedsam Jahre,
Für allem Leid bewahre
Und nähr uns mildiglich.**

*We praise Thee for all Thy kindness,
Father on heaven's throne,
That Thou shewest us
Through Christ, Thy Son,
And beseech Thee now as well:
To grant us a peaceful year,
To protect us from all sorrow
And gently to sustain us.*

February 9, 2020

*Herr Gott,
dich loben wir* BWV 16



Cantata for New Year's Day (The Feast of the Circumcision)

Epistle: Galatians 3:23–29

Gospel: Luke 2:21

First performed: 1 January 1726

Forces: SATB chorus, ATB solos, two oboes (the first doubling oboe da caccia), corno da caccia, strings, and continuo

Two days after hearing *Gottlob! nun geht das Jahr zu Ende*, Bach treated his congregation to this New Year's cantata, *Herr Gott, dich loben wir* BWV 16—his third for the feast, first heard on 1 January 1726. He drew the libretto from a 1711 published collection by Georg Christian Lehms—similar to the Neumeister collection from which Bach had drawn the libretto for *Gottlob!* (Bach, however, added the final four-part chorale to this cantata, as Lehms did not include it.) As with the other cantatas surrounding the New Year that we've heard in this year's Bach Experience, Lehms elected to focus on the New Year and its promise for the Christian.

The opening chorus resembles the standard chorale cantata opening, in which long notes in the soprano are surrounded by rich, free polyphony in the other voices. The setting is not a chorale, properly speaking, but rather an excerpt from the Lutheran *Te Deum*, a hymn traditionally sung by many Christians at the New Year. Scored for two oboes and strings, this particular movement integrates the instruments into the polyphonic texture. There are no “breaks” between each line of the text where the voices stop and the instruments play a ritornello; rather, in between statements of the tune, the remaining voices and instruments continue their exceptionally active polyphonic lines. The oboe I/violin I line in particular adds a sort of descant to the texture, placing another voice of polyphony above the otherwise prominent high-voice melody in the soprano (doubled by the horn).

A secco recitative for bass follows, declaiming elaborate words of praise that also appear in the aria that follows. The aria is a fascinating example among Bach's output, unique in its scoring and structure. Within the straightforward da capo, he chose to set the A section (and its repetition) for all four voices, while setting the B section for bass alone (as well as obbligato horn); moreover, within the A section is a complex fugal

section, and within the B section is an unexpected choral interjection of the A section material. All of this occurs underneath an ornate and virtuosic obbligato trumpet part.

The recitative for alto and aria for tenor that follow turn to Jesus himself and the believer's trust in him. The aria was originally scored for "violetta," later changed to an oboe da caccia at a 1731 reprise of the cantata. The aria is strophic, but the librettist repeated the first two lines at the end; Bach takes his cue, utilizing a literal repeat of the singer's first statement of these lines at the end. He also assigns more than half the aria to just these two lines, fitting the remainder into a quasi-B section. The aria is in 3/4, but Bach composed melodic lines that occasionally hint at 6/8 or at least obscure the beat expected by the listener. The cantata concludes with the same chorale that concluded *Gottlob!*, Eber's *Helft mir Gotts Güte*.

I. Chorus

**Herr Gott, dich loben wir,
Herr Gott, wir danken dir.
Dich, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit,
Ehret die Welt weit und breit.**

*Lord God, we give Thee praise,
Lord God, we give Thee thanks.
All the world, far and wide,
Lauds Thee, God Father, eternally.*

II. Recitative (B)

So stimmen wir
Bei dieser frohen Zeit
Mit heißer Andacht an
Und legen dir,
O Gott, auf dieses neue Jahr
Das erste Herzensopfer dar.
Was hast du nicht von Ewigkeit
Für Heil an uns getan,
Und was muß unsre Brust
Noch jetzt vor Lieb und Treu verspüren!
Dein Zion sieht vollkommne Ruh,
Es fällt ihm Glück und Segen zu;
Der Tempel schallt
Von Psaltern und von Harfen,
Und unsre Seele wallt,
Wenn wir nur Andachtsglut in Herz
Und Munde führen.
O, sollte darum nicht ein neues Lied erklingen
Und wir in heißer Liebe singen?

*Thus shall we raise our song
On this joyful day
In ardent worship
And shall give to Thee,
O God, for this new year,
Our heart's first sacrifice.
What hast Thou not done, since time began,
For our salvation?
And how much does our breast
Still perceive of Thy love and faith!
Thy Zion beholds perfect peace,
Bliss and happiness are its portion;
The temple rings
With the sound of psaltery and harp,
And our soul surges,
If we but feel the fire of worship in our hearts
And on our lips.
Ah, should not, therefore, a new song ring out,
And should not we sing in fervent love?*

III. Aria (B) and Chorus

Laßt uns jauchzen, laßt uns freuen:
Gottes Güt und Treu
Bleibet alle Morgen neu.
—Krönt und segnet seine Hand,
Ach so glaubt, daß unser Stand
Ewig, ewig glücklich sei.—

*Let us rejoice, let us be glad:
God's goodness and faith
Is renewed each morning.
—If His hand crowns and blesses,
Ah, be sure, that we shall
Always be content.—*

IV. Recitative (A)

Ach treuer Hort,
Beschütz auch fernerhin dein wertest Wort,
Beschütze Kirch und Schule,
So wird dein Reich vermehrt
Und Satans arge List gestört;
Erhalte nur den Frieden
Und die beliebte Ruh,
So ist uns schon genug beschieden,
Und uns fällt lauter Wohlsein zu.
Ach! Gott, du wirst das Land
Noch ferner wässern,
Du wirst es stets verbessern,
Du wirst es selbst mit deiner Hand
Und deinem Segen bauen.
Wohl uns, wenn wir
Dir für und für,
Mein Jesus und mein Heil, vertrauen.

*Ah, faithful refuge,
Protect as in the past Thy precious Word,
Protect both church and school,
That Thy kingdom might increase
And Satan's wicked guile be destroyed;
If Thou but preservest peace
And blessed repose,
Our lot, indeed, shall be sufficient,
And we shall have naught but happiness.
Ah! God, Thou shalt continue
To water this land,
Thou shalt always improve it,
Thou shalt cultivate it with Thy very hand
And very blessing.
Happy us, if we
For evermore
Trust Thee, my Jesus, my Savior.*

V. Aria (T)

Geliebter Jesu, du allein
Sollst meiner Seelen Reichtum sein.
Wir wollen dich vor allen Schätzen
In unser treues Herze setzen,
Ja, wenn das Lebensband zerreißt,
Stimmt unser gottvergnügter Geist
Noch mit den Lippen sehlich ein:
Geliebter Jesu, du allein
Sollst meiner Seelen Reichtum sein.

*Beloved Jesus, Thou alone
Shalt be my soul's wealth.
We shall, before all other riches,
Enthroned Thee in our faithful heart,
Yea, when the thread of life breaks,
Our spirit shall, content in God,
Still sing with fervent lips:
Beloved Jesus, Thou alone
Shalt be my soul's wealth.*

VI. Chorale

All solch dein Güt wir preisen,
Vater ins Himmels Thron,
Die du uns tust beweisen
Durch Christum, deinen Sohn,
Und bitten ferner dich,
Gib uns ein friedlich Jahre,
Vor allem Leid bewahre
Und nähr uns mildiglich.

*We praise Thee for all Thy kindness,
Father on heaven's throne,
That Thou shewest us
Through Christ, Thy Son,
And beseech Thee now as well
To grant us a peaceful year,
To protect us from all sorrow
And gently to sustain us.*

April 26, 2020

Singet dem Herrn
ein neues Lied BWV 190



Cantata for New Year's Day (The Feast of the Circumcision)

Epistle: Galatians 3:23–29

Gospel: Luke 2:21

First performed: 1 January 1724

Forces: SATB chorus, ATB solos, three oboes (the first doubling oboe d'amore), bassoon, three trumpets, timpani, strings, and continuo

The final New Year's cantata in the Bach Experience actually came first among the four. *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* BWV 190 was Bach's first cantata for the Feast of the Circumcision after arriving at Leipzig, debuted on 1 January 1724. It therefore forms part of the first complete cantata cycle he would write there; for those who have heard the previous three cantatas in our series, it also marks a return to a more familiar and standard arrangement of movements.

Unfortunately, our picture of Bach's original performance version of *Singet dem Herrn* is corrupted by the loss of some important information. Only the performance parts for the voices and two violin parts survive, and the score of the first two movements has been lost. Luckily, the extant final chorale tells us the complete instrumentation, including the three oboes and festive trumpets and timpani; otherwise, however, the manner in which these instruments were deployed in the opening chorus, and whether they were used at all in the following recitative, cannot be known for certain. Skillful reconstructions by modern scholars have allowed us to come close to Bach's original. (Today we perform the reconstruction by Diethard Hellmann.)

As with many of the first cycle cantatas, the opening chorus sets an excerpt from Scripture—this time, three psalm verses: Psalm 149:1, 150.4, and 150.6. The chorus is organized into three sections; the first section sets the combined first two psalm verses, the second section the last psalm verse; the final section reprises the music of the opening ritornello, but on the word "Alleluia." Punctuating each section is a unison statement of a line from the Lutheran *Te Deum*, sung on its liturgical chant tone; recall that Bach wrote a whole opening chorus on these three lines alone in the cantata *Herr Gott, dich loben wir* BWV 16 two years later, performed as the third cantata of this year's Bach Experience. The second section of the chorus, setting Psalm 150:6, is a

strict fugue that first builds its way from low voices to high, then repeats from high voices to low—contributing to an overarching symmetry of the movement for which Bach is well known.

The recitative that follows reprises the *Te Deum* verses as it cycles through three different voices offering specific elements of praise and thanksgiving to God for the year that has just ended. The succeeding aria for alto develops this theme in a dancing 3/4 meter. The strings proceed in a homophonic texture in a similar style to the opening chorus; the simple strophic aria moves quickly through its six lines.

The first cycle cantatas often contain a shift in perspective midway through their librettos; *Singet dem Herrn* is no different. After a set of movements thanking God for the year that has past, the recitative for bass and duet for tenor and bass take on a pleading character for Christ's embrace and protection. The repetition of the name of Jesus in the duet call attention to the actual liturgical feast—the Circumcision—marking the day on which Christ formally received his name. The significance of being able to invoke the embrace of God by calling out to a man by name stands as one of the essential mysteries of Christianity. The duet, like the first aria, displays a calm but warm joyousness in its flowing melodic lines and dancelike meter and rhythm.

The final recitative lists a series of intercessions asked of Jesus for the following year; the tenor is given the sustained string “halo” familiar to us from the *St. Matthew Passion* BWV 244. The chorale *Jesu, nun sei gepreiset*—which formed the basis of the chorale cantata for the Sunday after Christmas almost one year later (and heard as the first cantata of this year's Bach Experience)—closes the work, each line interspersed with a fanfare from the trumpet choir.

I. Chorus

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied!
Die Gemeinde der Heiligen soll ihn loben!
Lobet ihn mit Pauken und Reigen,
Lobet ihn mit Saiten und Pfeifen!
Herr Gott, dich loben wir!
Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn!
Herr Gott, wir danken dir!
Alleluja!

*Sing unto the Lord a new song,
And His praise in the congregation of saints!
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance,
Praise Him with stringed instruments and organs!
Lord God, we give Thee praise!
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!
Lord God, we give Thee thanks!
Alleluia!*

II. Chorus and Recitative (ATB)

Herr Gott, dich loben wir,
Daß du mit diesem neuen Jahr
Uns neues Glück und neuen Segen schenkest
Und noch in Gnaden an uns denkest.

***Lord God, we give Thee praise,**
That Thou with this New Year
Grant us new happiness and blessing,
And still thinkest on us with favor.*

Herr Gott, wir danken dir,
Daß deine Gütigkeit
In der vergangen Zeit
Das ganze Land und unsre werthe Stadt
Vor Teurung, Pestilenz und Krieg behüetet hat.

Herr Gott, dich loben wir,
Denn deine Vätertreu
Hat noch kein Ende,
Sie wird bei uns noch alle Morgen neu.
Drum falten wir,
Barmherzger Gott, dafür
In Demut unsre Hände
Und sagen lebenslang
Mit Mund und Herzen Lob und Dank.

Herr Gott, wir danken dir!

*Lord God, we give Thee thanks,
That Thy kindness
In the days now past
Has protected the whole land and our worthy city
From famine, pestilence, and war.*

*Lord God, we give Thee praise.
For Thy paternal faith
Is boundless,
It is renewed each morning with us.
And so we fold,
Merciful God,
Our hands in humility
And praise and give thanks throughout our lives
With mouth and heart.*

Lord God, we give Thee thanks!

III. Aria (A)

Lobe, Zion, deinen Gott,
Lobe deinen Gott mit Freuden,
Auf! erzähle dessen Ruhm,
Der in seinem Heiligtum
Fernerhin dich als dein Hirt
Will auf grüner Auen weiden.

*Praise, O Zion, Thy God,
Praise Thy God with gladness,
Rise! And speak now of His fame,
Who shall lead you, as your shepherd,
To graze in His sanctuary
On green pastures.*

IV. Recitative (B)

Es wünsche sich die Welt,
Was Fleisch und Blute wohlgefällt;
Nur eins, eins bitt ich von dem Herrn,
Dies eine hätt ich gern,
Daß Jesus, meine Freude,
Mein treuer Hirt, mein Trost und Heil
Und meiner Seelen bestes Teil,
Mich als ein Schäflein seiner Weide
Auch dieses Jahr mit seinem Schutz umfasse
Und nimmermehr aus seinen Armen lasse.
Sein guter Geist,
Der mir den Weg zum Leben weist,
Regier und führe mich auf ebner Bahn,
So fang ich dieses Jahr in Jesu Namen an.

*Let the world desire
What pleases flesh and blood;
Just this, this only I ask of the Lord,
Just this one thing would I like,
That Jesus, my joy,
My true shepherd, my comfort and salvation
And my soul's best portion,
Might embrace me as a lamb of His pasture
This year too with His protection
And nevermore let me from His grasp.
May His kindly spirit,
That shews me the way to life,
Govern and lead me on an even course,
And I shall begin this year in Jesus's name.*

V. Duet (T, B)

Jesus soll mein alles sein,
Jesus soll mein Anfang bleiben,
Jesus ist mein Freudenschein,
Jesu will ich mich verschreiben.
Jesus hilft mir durch sein Blut,
Jesus macht mein Ende gut.

*Jesus shall be my all,
Jesus shall be my beginning,
Jesus is my light of joy,
To Jesus I would devote myself.
Jesus helps me through His blood,
Jesus makes my ending good.*

VI. Recitative (T)

Nun, Jesus gebe, daß mit dem neuen Jahr
Auch sein Gesalbter lebe;
Er segne beides, Stamm und Zweige,
Auf daß ihr Glück bis an die Wolken steige.
Es segne Jesus Kirch und Schul,
Er segne alle treue Lehrer,
Er segne seines Wortes Hörer;
Er segne Rat und Richterstuhl;
Er gieß auch über jedes Haus
In unsrer Stadt die Segensquellen aus;
Er gebe, daß aufs neu
Sich Fried und Treu
In unsern Grenzen küssen mögen.
So leben wir dies ganze Jahr im Segen.

*Now, Jesus grant me that with the new year
His anointed one too may flourish;
May He bless both trunk and branches,
That their fortune rise to the clouds.
Let Jesus bless both church and school,
May He bless all true teachers,
May He bless those who hear His teaching;
May He bless both council and court;
May He pour over every house
In our town the springs of blessing;
May He grant that once again
Both peace and faith
Might embrace within our borders.
Thus we shall live throughout the year in blessing.*

VII. Chorale

**Laß uns das Jahr vollbringen
Zu Lob dem Namen dein,
Daß wir demselben singen
In der Christen Gemein;
Wollst uns das Leben fristen
Durch dein allmächtig Hand,
Erhalt deine lieben Christen
Und unser Vaterland.
Dein Segen zu uns wende,
Gib Fried an allem Ende;
Gib unverfälscht im Lande
Dein seligmachend Wort.
Die Heuchler mach zuschanden
Hier und an allem Ort!**

*Let us complete this year
In praise of Thy name,
That we may sing to it
In the Christian fold;
Extend our life
Through Thine almighty hand,
Preserve Thy beloved Christians
And our fatherland.
Turn Thy blessing upon us,
Give peace to all around,
Give throughout the land
Thy pure and joy-inspiring Word.
Destroy all the hypocrites
Here and everywhere!*

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