Christmas Oratorio (BWV 248)

This work was first rendered during the Christmas season of 1734-35 in the main churches of Leipzig. **Part I** on Saturday, 25 December, at the morning service in the St. Nicholas Church, and at vespers in the St. Thomas Church; **Part II** on Sunday, 26 December, at the morning service in the St. Thomas Church, and at vespers in the St. Nicholas Church; **Part III** on Monday, 27 December, in the St. Nicholas Church; **Part IV** on Saturday, 1 January, at the morning service in the St. Thomas Church, and at vespers in the St. Nicholas Church; **Part V** on Sunday, 2 January, in the St. Nicholas Church; and **Part VI** on Thursday, 6 January, at the morning service in the St. Thomas Church, and at vespers in the St. Nicholas Church.

There are some revisions entered into Bach’s score and performing parts for later renderings, but we do not know in which years these were made. A traversal through all six parts is possible for the Christmas seasons of 1739-40, 1744-45, and 1745-46, since the series of festival days then were the same as for 1734-35. Possibly individual cantatas from the set were rendered in various years. In any event, the libretto appears to have been left unchanged. (In years that the Christmas Oratorio was not rendered, Bach performed various liturgically appropriate cantatas that did not form into an oratorio cycle.)

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[Part I] First Festival Day in Christmas

[1] CHORUS

Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset
die Tage,
Rühmet, was heute der Höchste
getan!

Shout, exult, arise, praise the
days [of Christmas],
glorify what the Most High this
day has done!
Lasset das Zagen, verbannet die Klage,
Stimmet voll Jauchzen und Fröhlichkeit an!
Dienet dem Höchsten mit herrlichen Chören,
Laßt uns den Namen des Herrschers verehren!

[2] EVANGELIST
Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, daß ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augustus ausging, daß alle Welt geschätzt werde. Und jedermann ging, daß er sich schätzen ließe, ein jeglicher in seine Stadt. Da machte sich auch auf Joseph aus Galiläa, aus der Stadt Nazareth, in das jüdische Land zur Stadt David, die da heißt Bethlehem; darum, daß er von dem Hause und Geschlechte David war, auf daß er sich schätzen ließe mit Maria, seinem vertrauten Weibe, die war schwanger. Und als sie derselbst waren, kam die Zeit, daß sie gebären sollte.

[3] RECITATIVE
Nun wird mein liebster Brautigam,
Nun wird der Held aus Davids Stamm
Zum Trost, zum Heil der Erden

Now will my most beloved bridegroom,
now will the champion from the tribe of David —
for the consolation, for the salvation of the earth —

1The libretto here skips over Luke 2:2: “And this census was the very first: and [it] took place at the time that Cyrinius was governor in Syria” (this is Luther’s rendering—Luke 2:2 has been variously translated and is historically controversial).

2In a few particular contexts Luther does translate the Bible’s loudaia as “Judea [Luther: Judäa],” but for the most part he renders it “the Jewish region.”
Einmal geboren werden.
Nun wird der Stern aus Jakob scheinen,
Sein Strahl bricht schon hervor.
Auf, Zion, und verlasse nun das Weinen,
Dein Wohl steigt hoch empor!

[4] ARIA
Bereite dich, Zion, mit zärtlichen Trieben,
Den Schönsten, den Liebsten bald bei dir zu sehn!
Deine Wangen Müssen heut viel schöner prangen,
Eile, den Bräutigam sehnlichst zu lieben!

[5] CHORALE
Wie soll ich dich empfangen
Und wie begegn' ich dir,
O aller Welt Verlangen,
O meiner Seelen Zier?
O Jesu, Jesu, setze
Mir selbst die Fackel bei,
Damit, was dich ergötze,
Mir kund und wissend sei.

at last be born.³
Now will the star out of Jacob shine;⁴
its stream of light⁵ is already breaking forth.
Arise, Zion, and forsake weeping now;
your well-being lifts on high!

Make yourself ready, Zion, with tender desires,
to see the Most Handsome, the Most Beloved, soon at your side!
This day your cheeks must sparkle much lovelier;
hurry on, to love the Bridegroom most ardently!⁶

How shall I receive you, and how shall I meet you,⁷
o desire of all the world, o decoration of my soul?
O Jesus; Jesus, set the torch⁸ next to me yourself, so that whatever brings you enjoyment may be manifest and known to me.

³That is, Jesus is the Messiah, and his “bride” is the church (“Zion”).
⁴See the “star out of Jacob” at Numbers 24:17.
⁵See also Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26, where the personification of wisdom is described as a “radiant stream of glory from the Almighty [Luther: Strahl der Herrlichkeit des Allmächtigen].”
⁶Much of this (highly erotic) imagery comes from the Song of Songs, passim. Revelation 19:7 speaks of the “marriage” of Jesus (“the Lamb”) and the church (“the wife,” who “makes herself ready”).
⁷Sirach 15:2, “And she will meet him as a mother: and will receive him as a young bride [Luther: wie eine junge Braut].”
⁸See Psalm 119:105, “Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light on my path.”
[6] EVANGELIST
Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn und wickelte ihn in Windeln und legte ihn in eine Krippen, denn sie hatten sonst keinen Raum in der Herberge.

[7] CHORALE AND RECITATIVE
Er ist auf Erden kommen arm,
Wer will die Liebe recht erhöhn,
Die unser Heiland vor uns hegt?
Daß er unser sich erbarm,
Ja, wer vermag es einzusehen,
Wie ihn der Menschen Leid bewegt?
Und in dem Himmel mache reich,
Des Höchsten Sohn kommt in die Welt,
Weil ihm ihr Heil so wohl gefällt,
Und seinen lieben Engeln gleich.
So will er selbst als Mensch geboren werden.

Kyrieleis.

[8] ARIA
Großer Herr, o starker König,
Liebster Heiland, o wie wenig

He has come on earth poor,
Who will properly extol the love
that our Savior feels for us?
that he might have mercy on us,
Indeed, who is capable of perceiving it,
how human suffering moves him?
and might make [us] rich,\(^9\) in heaven,
The Son of the Most High comes into the world because its salvation pleases him so well
and [might make us] equal to his dear angels,\(^10\)
that he himself wants to be born as man.

Lord have mercy.

Great Lord, o mighty King,
most beloved Savior, o how little

\(^9\)Erster Sohn is Luther’s rendition throughout the Bible for the “firstborn,” which is a technical term: God has a claim to the “firstborn” of animals and of humans (see Exodus 13:1-2). At Luke 2:22-39 Jesus will be brought to the Temple in Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord as the firstborn (a practice actually unknown, however, in Jewish tradition from either the written or oral law). Bearing in mind this technical language, incidentally, we do not have to conclude that Mary later gave birth to other children.

\(^10\)The idea that Jesus makes people rich through his poverty comes from 2 Corinthians 8:9.

\(^11\)This idea comes from Luke 20:36, “they are equal to the angels [Luther: den Engeln gleich].”
Christmas Oratorio

Achtest du der Erden Pracht!
Der die ganze Welt erhält,
Ihre Pracht und Zier erschaffen,
Muß in harten Krippen schlafen.

[9] CHORALE
Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein,
Mach dir ein rein sanft Bettelein,
Zu ruhn in meines Herzens Schrein,
Daß ich nimmer vergesse dein!

Oh you regard the earth’s splendor!
He, who upholds the entire world,
who has created its splendor and decoration,
must sleep in harsh mangers.

[Part II] Second Festival Day in Christmas

[10] SINFONIA

Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend auf dem Felde bei den Hürden, die hütteten des Nachts ihre Herde. Und siehe, des Herren Engel trat zu ihnen, und die Klarheit des Herren leuchtet’ um sie, und sie furchten sich sehr.

And there were in the same vicinity shepherds in the field, by the live-stock pens; they guarded their flocks by night. And look, the Angel of the Lord approached them, and the radiance of the Lord lit up around them, and they were very afraid.

[12] CHORALE
Brich an, o schönes Morgenlicht,
Und laß den Himmel tagen!
Du Hirtenvolk, erschrecke nicht,
Weil dir die Engel sagen,
Daß dieses schwache Knäbelein

Break out, o lovely morning light,
and let heaven dawn!
You shepherd folk, do not be alarmed;
for the angels tell you that this weak little boy

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12 Not *erhält* but *gemacht* ("made") in the printed libretto distributed to Bach’s Leipzig congregants—the change has destroyed the rhyme with *Pracht*.

13 Hosea 6:3, "he [the Lord] will break forth like the lovely red [light] of the morning [Luther: *hervor brechen wie die schöne Morgenröte"]."
Bach's Oratorios

Soll unser Trost und Freude sein,    
Dazu den Satan zwingen     
Und letztlich Friede bringen!

shall be our comfort and joy,    
[shall] vanquish Satan, too,      
and finally bring peace!

[13] EVANGELIST
Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen:

And the angel said to them:

Fürchtet euch nicht! Siehe, ich ver-

Fear not! Look, I announce to

kündige euch große Freude, die al-

you great joy, which will come
tem Volke widerfahren wird; denn    
to all people;¹⁴ for to you this
euch ist heute der Heiland ge-

day is born in the city of David    
boren, welcher ist Christus, der    
the Savior, who is Christ, the    
Herr, in der Stadt David.

Lord.

¹⁴ *Allem Volke* is ambiguous: it might most readily be taken to mean “all [of the] people  
in the world,” but it might possibly be read as “all the people [of historical Israel]” (which  
is what the Greek text in Luke most likely means). The former is apparently what Luther  
intends: his commentary on the passage says *die allen Leuten widerfahren wird* (literally,  
“which will come to all people”). Although some commentators have, like Luther, under-
stood Luke here to be including gentiles, noting that in Acts 15:14 and 18:10 the gentiles are  
reckoned in the “people of God,” in Luke 2 the birth of the Davidic Savior is probably said  
to be for “the whole people [of (historical, “Jewish”) Israel]”; see, too, Luke 3:21; 7:29; 8:47.  
In place of Luther’s *die allem Volk widerfahren wird*, modern German Bibles read either, e.g.,  
die für das ganze Volk sein wird (“that will be for the entire people [of Israel]”), or *für alle  
Menschen* (“for all [of the] persons [in the world]”).

¹⁵See Genesis 12:2-3.
Christmas Oratorio

[15] ARIA
Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet,
Eh ihr euch zu lang verweilet,
Eilt, das holde Kind zu sehn!
Geht, die Freude heißt zu schön,
Sucht die Anmut zu gewinnen,
Geht und labet Herz und Sinnen!

Joyful shepherds, hurry, oh hurry,
before you tarry too long;
hurry, to see the pleasing child!
Go, the joy is all too lovely;
seek to gain the refinement [of this child];
go and refresh your hearts and minds!16

[16] EVANGELIST
Und das habt zum Zeichen: Ihr werdet finden das Kind in Windeln gewickelt und in einer Krippe liegen.

And take this for a sign: you will find the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

[17] CHORALE
Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall,
Des Herrschafft geht überall.
Da Speise vormals sucht ein Rind,
Da ruhet itzt der Jungfrau’n Kind.

Look there, yonder in the dark stall lies
he whose lordship ranges all over [to the ends of the earth].17
Where once an ox sought food,
there now rests the Virgin’s child.

[18] RECITATIVE
So geht denn hin, ihr Hirten, geht,
Daß ihr das Wunder seht!
Und findet ihr des Höchsten Sohn
In einer harten Krippe liegen,
So singet ihm bei seiner Wiegen
Aus einem süßen Ton

So go forth, then, you shepherds; go,
that you may see the marvel!
And should you find the Son of the Most High
lying in a harsh manger,
then sing for him by his cradle
—in a sweet tone

16For “refresh your hearts,” see, e.g., Genesis 18:5, translated literally by Luther from the Hebrew as ihr euer Herz labet; for “heart and minds,” see Philippians 4:7 (Luther: eure Herzen und Sinne in Christo Jesu).

17Zechariah 9:10 (Luther: ... bis an der Welt Ende).
Und mit gesamtem Chor
Dies Lied zur Ruhe vor:

[19] ARIA
Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße
der Ruh,
Wache nach diesem vor aller
Gedeihen!
Labe die Brust,
Empfinde die Lust,
Wo wir unser Herz
erfreuen!

[20] EVANGELIST
Und alsobald war da bei dem
Engel die Menge der himmlischen
Heerscharen, die lobten Gott und
sprachen:

[21] CHOIR OF ANGELS
Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und
Friede auf Erden und den Men-
schen ein Wohlgefaißen.

and with united choir—
this lullaby:

Sleep, my Most Beloved, enjoy
your rest,
awake after this for the
flourishing of all!
Refresh your breast,
feel the delight
[there, in your rest], where
we gladden our hearts!

And immediately there was with
the angel the multitude of the
heavenly legions, lauding God
and saying:

May honor be to God on high,
and peace on earth, and to hu-
mankind [God’s] great pleas-
ure.

18 A full choir, as opposed, e.g., to the choirs of Psalm 53, whose heading, in Luther’s
Bible, calls for a divided assembly to sing antiphonally (Luther: im Chor um einander vorzu-
singen).

19 See 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, “I have planted, Apollo has watered, but God has caused
the flourishing [Luther: hat das Gedeihen gegeben].”

20 This verse has been textually contested. The source that Luther used gave the term
eudokia (“good will,” “pleasure,” or “favor”) in the nominative case, whereas the best an-
cient manuscripts have it in the genitive, eudokias. The Latin Bible (the Vulgate), going with
the genitive, famously rendered the disputed passage with hominibus bona voluntatis, and
Luther was concerned that this reading (“[peace on earth] to persons of good will”) sug-
gested God’s favor could be merited. Luther’s translating the nominative reading—not to
mention his adding the word “and”—made it possible to understand the passage as pro-
fessing “good will toward humankind,” a reading more clearly promoting a “theology of
unmerited grace.” Luther was probably wrong to prefer the nominative over the genitive,
but further evidence from word studies of the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls
suggests that the genitive reading, too, should be understood primarily in terms of God’s
grace (“peace on earth to persons of [God’s] favor”).
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[22] RECITATIVE
So recht, ihr Engel, jauchzt und singet,
Daß es uns heut so schön gelinget!
Auf denn! Wir stimmen mit euch ein;
Uns kann es so wie euch erfreun.

[23] CHORALE
Wir singen dir in deinem Heer
Aus aller Kraft Lob, Preis und Ehr,
Daß du, o lang gewünschter Gast,
Dich nunmehr eingestellet hast.

[Part III] Third Festival Day in Christmas

[24] CHORUS
Herrsch der Himmels, erhöre das Lallen,
Laß dir die matten Gesänge gefallen,
Wenn dich dein Zion mit Psalmen erhöht!

Quite right, you angels: shout and sing
that for us this day has prospered so beautifully?
Arise then! We will join with you in song;
it can gladden us just like you.

We sing to you, amid your host,
with all our power, “laud, praise, and honor,”
that you, o long desired guest, have now presented yourself.

Ruler of heaven, give heed to our babble,
let our feeble songs please you,
when your Zion extols you with psalms!

21Psalm 118:24–25, “This is the day that the Lord has made . . . O Lord, let [us] prosper well [Luther: laß wohl gelingen].”
22An allusion to Revelation 5:12, “The lamb . . . is worthy to receive power, . . . and honor, and praise, and laud.” See, too, Revelation 7:12.
23See Jeremiah 14:8, “why do you [God] present yourself as if you were a guest in the land [Luther: warum steltest du dich, als wärest du ein Gast (Hebrew: ger) im Lande]?” Luther likewise uses the word “guest” in the sense of “stranger,” “sojourner,” or “alien” for the Hebrew word ger in Exodus 18:3 and Psalm 119:19, as well as for the Greek word xenos in Matthew 25:35–44, Acts 17:21, Ephesians 2:19, and Hebrews 11:13. (Incidentally, only in postbiblical writings does ger take on the meaning of “convert”; to be precise: Rabbinic law distinguished between the ger toshav [resident sojourner] who observes the Noahide Laws and is guaranteed a place in the world to come, and the ger tsedeq [the full “proselyte of righteousness”] who is a Jew in every respect.) Bach’s chorale no. 23 appropriates Jeremiah’s negative language to speak in a positive manner of God’s earthly sojourn in the human body of Jesus.
24See Psalm 119:108, “Let the willing offering of my mouth please you, Lord [Luther: laß dir gefallen, HErr, das willige Opfer meines Mundes].”
Höre der Herzen frohlockendes
Preisen,
Wenn wir dir itzo die Ehrfurcht
erweisen,
Weil unser Wohlfahrt befestiget
steht!

[25] EVANGELIST
Und da die Engel von ihnen gen
Himmel fuhren, sprachen die Hir-
ten untereinander:

[26] CHORUS
Lasset uns nun gehen gen Bethle-
hem und die Geschichte sehen, die
da geschehen ist, die uns der Herr
kundgetan hat.

[27] RECITATIVE
Er hat sein Volk getrost',
Er hat sein Israel erlost,
Die Hülfl aus Zion hergesendet
Und unser Leid geendet.
Seht, Hirten, dies hat er
getan;
Geht, dieses trefft ihr an!

Hear the exultant praises of our
hearts,
when we now show you
reverence
because our welfare stands fast!

And when the angels went away
from them into heaven, the shep-
herds said to one another:

Let’s go, now, into Bethlehem
and see what the story is that’s
taking place there, which the
Lord has made known to us.

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25 The term Luke uses is rheima, which normally means “word”; in Luke it is a Sem-
itisim, translating the Hebrew davar, which carries the double meaning of “word” and
“deed.” (Thus, many English translations read, “see this thing [or, event] that has taken
place.”) To capture both senses of davar in one word in German and in English is very
difficult. Luther brilliantly opts for Geschichte, which means both “history” (“events,” or
“deeds”) and “narrative” (“words”). To “see the history/narrative” (die Geschichte sehen) is a
bit odd in German, and though my translation of Luther is awkward, I have tried to reflect
his double sense with the colloquial rendering, “see what the story is.” The idea in Luke 2:15
is that the birth of Jesus is a “deed” from God, one that “speaks” to humankind.

26 That is, that the angel of the Lord had made known to them.

27 Isaiah 49:13, “the Lord has comforted his people [Luther: der HErr hat sein Volk get-
rostet].” See also Luke 2:25.

28 Psalm 14:7, “Oh, that salvation out of Zion might come over Israel, and the Lord his
captive people might redeem [Luther: Ach, daß die Hilfe aus Zion über Israel käme, und der
Herr sein gefangen Volk erlösete]!” The same words appear at Psalm 53:7 in the Luther Bible

29 See Isaiah 40:2, “Speak in a friendly way with Jerusalem, and preach to her that her
difficult obligation has [come to] an end [Luther: Redet mit Jerusalem freundlich; und prediget
ihr, daß ihre Ritterschaft ein Ende hat].” Luther considered this “Ritterschaft” to be the life of
sin under the law of Moses; Jesus, the Messiah believed to be prophesied here in Isaiah,
came to forgive sin through grace, to free people, Luther believed, from that of which the
law accuses them.
[28] **CHORALE**

Dies hat er alles uns getan,  
Sein groß Lieb zu zeigen an;  
Des freu sich alle  
Christenheit  
Und dank ihm des in  
Ewigkeit.  
Kyrieleis!

All this he has done for us to show his great love;  
for this let all of Christendom be glad  
and thank him for this in eternity.  
Lord have mercy!

[29] **ARIA**

Herr, dein Mitleid, dein Erbarmen  
Tröstet uns und macht uns frei.  
Deine holde Gunst und Liebe,  
Deine wundersamen Triebe  
Machen deine Vatertreu  
Wieder neu.

Lord, your compassion, your mercy  
comforts us and makes us free.  
Your pleasing favor and love,  
your wondrous desires,  
make your Fatherly faithfulness new again.

[30] **EVANGELIST**

Und sie kamen eilend und funden beide, Mariam und Joseph, dazu das Kind in der Krippe liegen. Da sie es aber gesehen hatten, breiteten sie das Wort aus, welches zu ihnen von diesem Kind gesaget war. Und alle, für die es kam, wunderten sich der Rede, die ihnen die Hirten gesaget hatten.

And they came in a hurry and found both Mariam and Joseph, and also the child lying in the manger. But when they had seen it, they spread the word that had been told to them of this child. And all who met with it were surprised at the account that the shepherds had told

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30See Psalm 126:3, “the Lord has done great things [for] us [Luther: der Herr hat grosses an uns getan].”

311 John 3:1, “Look, what love [God] the Father has shown to us [Luther: Sehet, welche Liebe hat uns der Vater gezeigt].”

32Lamentations 3:22-23, “the Lord’s mercy . . . is new every morning, and great is your [the Lord’s] faithfulness [Luther: seine Barmherzigkeit . . . ist alle Morgen neu, und deine Treu ist groß].”

33Luther here too brilliantly renders the meaning of rheima (see n. 25, above) with das Wort ausbreiten, whose double meaning I’ve tried to preserve with “spread the word.” Another beauty of the German is that since both Kind and Wort are neuter, the es in this sentence and the next can be understood both of the “child” and of the “word”—Jesus is, after all, “the Word made flesh,” according to John 1:14.

34Mary already knew that Jesus was to be both the Messiah (Luke 1:32-35) and “Lord” (1:43). The shepherds add that he will be “the Savior” (2:11).

35Here the archaic form of the separable verb vorkommen is used (Luther: für . . . kam).
Maria aber behielt alle diese Worte und bewegte sie in ihrem Herzen. But Mary kept all these words and tossed them about within her heart.

[31] ARIA
Schließt, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder
Fest in deinem Glauben ein!
Lasse dies Wunder, die göttlichen Werke,
Immer zur Stärke
Deines schwachen Glaubens sein!

My heart, include this blessed marvel steadfastly in your faith!
Let this marvel, [let all] the Godly deeds, be ever at hand for the strengthening of your weak faith.

[32] RECITATIVE
Ja, ja, mein Herz soll es bewahren,
Was es an dieser holden Zeit Zu seiner Seligkeit Für sicheren Beweis erfahren.

Yes, yes, my heart should safeguard what it at this pleasing time, for its [eternal] blessedness, has experienced as sure proof.

[33] CHORALE
Ich will dich mit Fleiß bewahren,
Ich will dir Leben hier,
Dir will ich abfahren,
Mit dir will ich endlich schweben
Voller Freud

I will safeguard you [in my heart and memory] with diligence;
I will here [in this life] live to you, to you will I retreat;
with you will I at last hover, full of joy.

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36Greek: rheima (see n. 25, above).
37Luke’s verb symballein means literally “to throw side by side.”
38Luke 17:5, “And the apostles said to the Lord, strengthen our faith [Luther: stärke uns den Glauben].”
39Romans 14:8, “If we live, then we live to the Lord; if we die, then we die to the Lord [Luther: Leben wir, so leben wir dem HErrn; sterben wir, so sterben wir dem HErrn].”
40See Isaiah 58:14, “Then you will have delight in the Lord, and I will have you hover over the heights of the earth [Luther: ich will dich über die Höhen auf Erden schweben lassen] … for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.”
Ohne Zeit
Dort im andern Leben.

[34] EVANGELIST
Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um, preiseten und lobten Gott um alles, das sie gesehen und gehört hatten, wie denn zu ihnen gesagt war.

[35] CHORALE
Seid froh dieweil,
Seid froh dieweil,
Daß euer Heil
Ist hie ein Gott und auch ein Mensch geboren,
Der, welcher ist
Der Herr und Christ
In Davids Stadt, von vielen auserkoren.

REPEAT [24] CHORUS

[Part IV] Festival of the Circumcision of Christ

[36] CHORUS
Fallt mit Danken, fallt mit Loben
Vor des Höchsten Gnadenthron!
Gottes Sohn
Will der Erden
Heiland und Erlöser werden,

Be joyful meanwhile,
Be joyful meanwhile,
that your Salvation
has been born here [on earth]
as God and also as man —
he who is
the Lord and Christ,
in the city of David, chosen of many [cities].

41See Revelation 10:6, “And the angel swore by him who lives from eternity to eternity, who created heaven . . . that there should be time no more [Luther: daß hínfort keine Zeit mehr sein soll].”

42See Micah 5:1 (in Luther and Tanakh; 5:2 in other Bibles), “And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, you who are small among the thousands in Judah, out of you shall come to me the one who in Israel would be Lord.” Bethlehem is the chosen city.

43Isaiah 49:26, “I am the Lord, your Savior and redeemer.”
Gottes Sohn
Dämpft der Feinde Wut und Toben.

[37] EVANGELIST
Und da acht Tage um waren, daß das Kind beschnitten würde, da ward sein Name genennet Jesus, welcher genennet war von dem Engel, ehe denn er im Mutterleibe empfangen ward.

God’s Son
dampens the enemies’ fury and rage.

And as eight days were up, when the child would be circumcised, his name was called Jesus,44 [the name he] was called by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb.

[38] RECITATIVE AND CHORALE
Immanuel, o stifies Wort!
Mein Jesus heißt mein Hort,
Mein Jesus heißt mein Leben.
Mein Jesus hat sich mir ergeben;
Mein Jesus soll mir immerfort
Vor meinen Augen schweben.
Mein Jesus heißt meine Lust,
Mein Jesus labet Herz und Brust.
Jesu, du mein liebtestes Leben,
Meiner Seelen Bräutigam,
Komm! Ich will dich mit Lust umfassen,
Mein Herze soll dich nimmer lassen.
Der du dich vor mich gegeben
An des bittern Kreuzes Stamm!
Ach, so nimm mich zu dir!

"Emmanuel,"45 o sweet word!
My Jesus is called “my refuge,”46
my Jesus is called “my life.”
My Jesus has submitted himself to me;
my Jesus shall evermore, to me, hover before my eyes.
My Jesus is called “my delight,”
my Jesus refreshes heart and breast.
Jesus, you, my most beloved life,
my soul’s bridegroom,
Come! With delight I will embrace you,
my heart shall never leave you.
you who has given himself for me
on the beam of the bitter cross!
Oh, so take me to you!

44Luther translates literally the Semitism “his name was called Jesus.”
45Emmanuel is Hebrew for “God with us.”
46Bach’s score reads Hirt (“shepherd”); his original performing part at first read Hirt but was changed (possibly by Bach) to Hort, which is also the reading in the libretto booklets distributed to Bach’s congregants in Leipzig. On the face of it, Hort would seem the more likely reading, as it rhymes with the first line’s Wort. In Luther’s Bible mein Hort is a common, figurative rendering of what is typically translated from the Hebrew more literally in English Bibles as “my rock” (see, e.g., 2 Samuel 22:47).
Auch in dem Sterben sollst du mir
Das Allerliebste sein;
In Not, Gefahr und Ungemach
Seh ich dir sehnlichst nach.
Was jagte mir zuletzt der Tod für Grauen ein?
Mein Jesus! Wenn ich sterbe,
So weiß ich, daß ich nicht verderbe.
Dein Name steht in mir geschrieben,
Der hat des Todes Furcht vertrieben.

[39] ARIA
Floßt, mein Heiland, floßt dein Namen
Auch den allerkleinsten Samen
Jenes strengen Schreckens ein?
Nein, du sagst ja selber nein;
(Nein!)
[Nein, du sagst ja selber: (Nein!)]
Sollt ich nun das Sterben scheuen?
Nein, dein süßes Wort ist da!
Oder sollt ich mich erfreuen?
Ja, du Heiland sprichst selbst ja.
(Ja!) [Ja, du Heiland sprichst selbst: (Ja!)]

[40] RECITATIVE AND CHORALE
Wohlan, dein Name soll allein
In meinem Herzen sein!
Jesu, meine Freud und Wonne,
Meine Hoffnung, Schatz und Teil,

Well then, your name alone shall be in my heart!
Jesus, my joy and gladness, my hope, treasure, and portion,
Bach's Oratorios

So will ich dich entzückt nennen,
Wenn Brust und Herz zu dir vor Liebe brennen.
Mein Erlösung, Schmuck und Heil,
Doch, Liebster, sage mir:
 Wie rühm ich dich, wie dank ich dir?
Hirt und König, Licht und Sonne,
Ach! wie soll ich würdiglich,
Mein Herr Jesu, preisen dich?

[41] ARIA
Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben,
Mein Heiland, gib mir Kraft und Mut,
Daß es mein Herz recht eifrig tut!
Stärke mich,
Deine Gnade würdiglich
Und mit Danken zu erheben!

[42] CHORALE
Jesus richte mein Beginnen,
Jesus bleibe stets bei mir,

These are what I, in a trance,\(^4\) will call you,
when [my] breast and heart burn with love for you.
my redemption, adornment, and salvation,\(^4\)
But tell me, Most Beloved:
How may I glorify you, how may I thank you?
shepherd and king, light and sun,\(^5\)
oh!—how shall I worthily praise you, my Lord Jesus?\(^6\)

For honor I will live only to you\(^7\);
my Savior, give me power and courage,
that my heart will do it right zealously!
Strengthen me\(^8\) to exalt your grace worthily and with thanksgiving!

May Jesus direct my embarking;
may Jesus remain with me ever;

\(^4\)Entzücket, here is Lucan biblical language, not that of today's polite society (e.g., today's greeting, "enchanted, I'm sure"); see Acts 10:10, 11:5, 22:17.

\(^5\)The text reads Mein Erlösung, Schmuck und Heil in Bach's score and in the libretto booklets distributed to his congregants in Leipzig. In Bach's original performing parts his copyist evidently misread the score and wrote Mein Erlöser, Schutz und Heil ("my redeemer, bulwark, and salvation"). The copyist's reading corresponds to none of the hymnbooks of Bach's day.

\(^6\)The transfigured Jesus is so depicted in Matthew 17:2, "[Jesus'] face lit up like the sun; and his clothes became white, as a light."

\(^7\)Revelation 4:11, "Lord, you are worthy to take praise, and honor, and power [Luther: Herr, du bist würdig zu nehmen Preis, und Ehre, und Kraft]."

\(^8\)Romans 14:8, "If we live, then we live to the Lord [Luther: Leben wir, so leben wir dem Herrn]."

\(^8\)Psalm 119:28, "Strengthen me according to your word [Luther: stärke mich nach deinem Wort]."
Jesus zäume mir die Sinnen,
Jesus sei nur mein Begier,
Jesus sei mir in Gedanken,
Jesu, lasse mich nicht wanken!

may Jesus bridle my inclinations;
may Jesus only be my desire;
may Jesus be in the plans I devise;
Jesus, let me not waver!

[Part V] Sunday after New Year

[43] CHORUS
Ehre sei dir, Gott,
gesungen.
Dir sei Lob und Dank bereit.
Dich erhebet alle Welt,
Weil dir unser Wohl gefällt,
Weil anheut Unser aller Wunsch gelungen,
Weil uns dein Segen so herrlich erfreut.

May honor, God, be sung to you,
may laud and thanks be extended to you.
All the world exalts you, because our well-being pleases you,
because today the wish of all of us has come true,
because your blessing gladdens us so splendidly.

[44] EVANGELIST
Da Jesus geboren war zu Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande zur Zeit des Königes Herodis, siehe, da kamen die Weisen vom Morgenlande gen Jerusalem und sprachen:

[45] CHORUS
Wo ist der neugeborene König der Jüden?

When Jesus was born at Bethlehem in the Jewish region at the time of King Herod, look: there came the wisemen of the Orient to Jerusalem, saying:

Where is the newborn King of the Jews?

54The hymnbooks of Bach’s day read, lasse mich nie Wanken. The change from nie (“never”) to nicht (“not”) may have been made on the basis of Hebrews 10:23, “let us keep the profession of our hope and [let us] not waver [Luther: lasset uns halten an dem Bekenntnis der Hoffnung und nicht wanken].”

55Psalm 57:6 (Luther and Tanakh; 57:5 in other Bibles), “Be exalted, God, . . . and your honor [be exalted] over all the world [Luther: Erhebe dich, Gott, . . . und deine Ehre über alle Welt].”

56Herod was known by the title “King of the Jews,” according to the 1st-century historian Flavius Josephus. Suggesting this title for Jesus would represent a challenge to Herod. The wisemen are gentiles, and thus they call Jesus “King of the Jews” — Jews would normally use the expression “King of Israel.”
Bach's Oratorios

RECIPIE TIVE
Sucht ihn in meiner Brust,
Hier wohnt er, mir und ihm zur
Lust!

CHORUS
Wir haben seinen Stern gesehen
im Morgenlande und sind kom-
men, ihn anzubeten.

RECIPIE TIVE
Wohl euch, die ihr dies Licht
gesehen,
Es ist zu eurem Heil
geschehen!
Mein Heiland, du, du bist das
Licht,
Das auch den Heiden scheinen
sollen,
Und sie, sie kennen
dich noch
nicht,
Als sie dich schon verehren
wollen.
Wie hell, wie klar muß nicht dein
Schein,
Geliebter Jesu, sein!

CHORALE
Dein Glanz all Finsternis
verzehrt,
Die trübe Nacht in Licht
verkehrt.
Leit uns auf deinen Wegen,

Seek him in my breast;
here he dwells, to my and his
delight!

We have seen his star in the
Orient and have come to wor-
ship him.

Well for you, you who have
seen this light;
it has taken place for your
salvation!
You, my Savior, you are the
light
that shall shine also to the
gentiles,
and they [these gentiles, the
wisemen], they do not know
you yet,
[even now] as they already
want to revere you.
How bright, how clear must not
your luminosity be,
beloved Jesus!

Your luster consumes all
darkness,
turns the murky night into
light.
Lead us along your pathways,

57 Such (miraculous) stars were believed in the ancient world to attend the birth of a
great person.

58 There is some debate as to whether the Gospel of Matthew should here be under-
stood as saying that Jesus is "paid homage to" (as a king) or "worshiped" (as a divine
figure). Luther's anzubeten (literally, "to pray to") has the latter connotation.

59 Isaiah 9:2 (9:1 in Tanakh), "The people, walking in the dark like that, will see a great
light [Luther: das Volk, so im Finstern wandelt, sieht ein grosses Licht]."

60 Isaiah 49:6, "I [God] have also made you [Israel] for the light to the gentiles, that you
may be my salvation to the ends of the earth [Luther: Ich habe dich auch zum Licht der Heiden
gemacht, daß du seiest mein Heil bis an der Welt Ende]."

61 Isaiah 55:5, "Look, you will call gentiles whom you do not know; and gentiles who
do not know you will run to you for the sake of the Lord your God [Luther: Siehe, du wirst
Heiden rufen, die du nicht kennest; und Heiden, die dich nicht kennen, werden zu dir laufen um des
HErrn willen, deines Gottes]."
Daß dein Gesicht
Und herrlichs Licht
Wir ewig schauen mögen!

[47] ARIA
Erleucht auch meine finstre
Sinnen,
Erleuchte mein Herze
Durch der Strahlen klaren
Schein!
Dein Wort soll mir die hellste
Kerze
In allen meinen Werken sein;
Dies läset die Seele nichts
Böses beginnen.

[48] EVANGELIST
Da das der König Herodes hörte,
erschrak er und mit ihm das ganze
Jerusalem.

[49] RECITATIVE
Warum wollt ihr
erschrecken?
Kann meines Jesu Gegenwart
euch solche Furcht erwecken?
O! solltet ihr euch nicht
Vielmehr darüber freuen,
Weil er dadurch verspricht,
Der Menschen Wohlfahrt zu
verneuen.

[50] EVANGELIST
Und ließ versammeln alle Hohe-
priester und Schriftgelehrten unter
dem Volk und erforschte von
ihnen, wo Christus sollte geboren
werden. Und sie sagten ihm: Zu
Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande;
denn also steht geschrieben

that we may see your face
and glorious light
eternally!

Light up, too, my dark
inclinations,
light up my heart
with the clear luminosity of
your streams of light!
Your word shall be the
brightest candle to me
in all my works;
this will let the soul embark
on nothing evil.

When Herod the King heard
that, he was alarmed, and with
him all of Jerusalem.

Why would you all want to be
alarmed?
Can the presence of my Jesus
arouse such fear in you?
O! shouldn’t you
rather be glad about that,
because he promises through it
to renew the welfare of
humankind.

And [Herod] had all the chief
priests and scripture experts among the people gather, and
inquired of them, where [the] Christ was expected to be born.
And they told him: “at Beth-
lehem in the Jewish region; for

62This group consisted of men who copied biblical writings on scrolls and were learned in Mosaic laws and teachings. The standard English translation “scribe” might seem to overemphasize the writing component of their duties, while Luther’s rendering Schriftgelehrten (literally, “scholars of Scripture”) would seem to place the greater emphasis on their biblical learning.
durch den Propheten: Und du Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande bist mitnichten die kleinest unter den Fürsten Juda; denn aus dir soll mir kommen der Herzog, der über mein Volk Israel ein Herr sei.

[51] ARIA
Ach, wenn wird die Zeit erscheinen?
Ach, wenn kommt der Trost der Seinen?
Schweigt, er ist schon wirklich hier!
Jesu, ach so komm zu mir!

Oh, when will the time appear?
Oh, when shall the consolation of his own [saved people] come?
Silence! — he really is already here!
Jesus, oh then come to me!

63 A combination of Micah 5:1 (Luther and Tanakh; 5:2 in other Bibles) and 2 Samuel 5:2.

64 Matthew refers to Bethlehem in this way (i.e., the Gospel adds the expression “by no means”) presumably to counter the Hebrew Scriptures, where Bethlehem is generally considered insignificant. The birth of Jesus makes the city great.

65 The now standard Hebrew text (the “Masoretic Text”) of Micah here reads elephe ("thousands," "clans") but the Hebrew of the (consonants-only) ancient text could have been provided with different vowels to yield alluphe ("princes"), and this would explain how Matthew arrived at “princes” in citing Micah. The same ambiguity underlies the words translated in English Bibles either as “clans” or “dukes” in the genealogies of Genesis 36:15-43 and 1 Chronicles 1:51-54 (Luther there opts for Fürsten).

66 “To me” does not appear in Matthew. These words are presumably added on the basis of Micah 5:1 (in Luther and Tanakh; 5:2 in other Bibles), which Luther renders, “And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, you who are small among the thousands in Judah, out of you shall come to me the one who in Israel would be Lord [Luther: Und du, Bethlehem Ephrata, die du klein bist unter den Tausenden in Juda, aus dir soll mir der kommen, der in Israel Herr sei].”

67 To render Herzog here as “Duke” (an aristocratic title higher than a Count but lower than a King) would technically be correct but would sound too awkward. “Duke” comes from the Latin dux ("leader"), and Herzog comes from combining the noun Heer ("armed forces") and the past tense of the verb ziehen ("to draw or pull"); thus a Herzog or “Duke” is literally or figuratively “a military leader.” At 1 Samuel 25:30 and 2 Samuel 5:2 in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, King David is rendered a “Herzog [Hebrew: nagiwd, literally “one in front”] over Israel”; at Hebrews 2:10, Jesus is called a Herzog der Seligkeit, a “captain” (or, “pioneer”) [Greek: archegos, “chief leader”] of [eternal] “blessedness” (or, “salvation”).

68 Herr (“Lord”) here presumably in the sense of Herrscher (“ruler”), as in the first line of the recitative no. 52, below.
[52] RECITATIVE
Mein Liebster herrschet schon.
Ein Herz, das seine Herrschaft
liebet
Und sich ihm ganz zu eigen
 gibet,
Ist meines Jesu Thron.

My Most Beloved already rules.
A heart that loves his
Lordship,
and gives itself to him
completely for his own,
is [to be] my Jesus’ throne.

[53] CHORALE
Zwar ist solche
Herzensstube
Wohl kein schöner
Fürstensaal,
Sondern eine finstre Grube;
Doch, sobald dein
Gnadenstrahl
In derselben nur wird blinken,
Wird es voller Sonnen dünken.

True, such a heart-cellar [for
Jesus to dwell in] is
certainly no choice hall of
princes,
but rather a dark pit;
yet, as soon as your grace-filled
stream of light
flashes in this same [pit],
it will seem full of sunlight.

[Part VI] Festival of Epiphany

[54] CHORUS
Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde
schnauben,
So gib, daß wir im festen
Glauben
Nach deiner Macht und Hülfe
sehn!
Wir wollen dir allein
vertrauen,
So können wir den scharfen
Klauen
Des Feindes unversehrt
entgehn.

Lord, when our insolent enemies snort,
then grant that we in steadfast faith
will look to your strength and salvation!
We want to put our trust in you alone,
so that we can escape the enemy’s sharp claws unharmmed.

While Stolz primarily means “proud” in a more dignified sense, it is also an archaic synonym for übermutig, in the sense of “insolent” or “cocky.” In this way the word Stolz has the same double sense as the word zed in Hebrew, which means both “presumptuous” and “insolent” (thus, e.g., Psalm 86:14 reads in the KJV, “O God, the proud are risen against me,” but in the NRSV, “O God, the insolent rise up against me” [Luther: GÖtt, es setzen sich die Stolzen wider mich]). The closing movement, no. 64, identifies the four eschatological enemies of humankind: death, devil, sin, and hell.

See Jeremiah 8:16, concerning the enemy approach, “One heard their horses snorting [Luther: ihre Rosse . . . schnauben].”
Then Herod convened the wise-men secretly and sought with diligence to learn from them when the star might have appeared. And [he] directed them to Bethlehem, saying:

Set out and search diligently for the little child, and when you find it, report this to me, so that I, too, may come and worship it.

---

71 Compare Mark 6:19, "But Herodias had it in for him [John the Baptist] and wanted to kill him [Luther: Herodias aber stellte ihm nach, und wollte ihn töten]." Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great (the Herod of the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke), and sister of Herod Agrippa I (the Herod of Acts 12). She was first married to her paternal half-uncle Herod (mistakenly called "Philip" in Mark 6:17 and in many manuscripts of Matthew 14:3), to whom she bore a daughter, identified by the 1st-century historian Josephus as "Salome" (not to be confused with the Salome of Mark 15-16, possibly the wife of Zebedee). Salome was the one who at Herodias’s instigation asked her uncle and now step-father Herod Antipas (another half-uncle of Herodias and her second husband) for the head of John the Baptist as a reward for a special dance of Salome’s that Antipas had enjoyed. Herodias had it in for John because he had publicly condemned her marriage to Antipas (she had abandoned her first husband, and Antipas had divorced his royal Nabatean wife). In all the potential confusion of names, the one clear thing is that there is a great deal of depravity among the Herodians, and the Christmas Oratorio librettist may have used the language of Mark 6 because of this: just like Herodias later has it in for John, so does Herod now for Jesus.

72 The line reads in sichern Stand ("in a safe foothold") in the printed librettos distributed to Bach’s Leipzig congregants. This was probably the librettist’s original reading, as it provides a better contrast with line 1’s fallen. Whether the new version was an intended revision or simply a copying mistake is unclear. A possible advantage of the new reading is that it would identify the source of Jesus’ security, despite his own humanly incomprehensible power, more clearly in God the Father. See also the “hands” in line 1 of the next movement.
Nebst aller seiner List, des Höchsten Sohn, Den du zu stürzen suchst, sehr wohl bekannt.

[57] ARIA
Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen Stürzt ohnmächtiger Menschen Macht.
Hier wird alle Kraft verlacht!
Spricht der Höchste nur ein Wort,
Seiner Feinde Stolz zu enden,
O, so müssen sich sofort Sterblicher Gedanken wenden.

[58] EVANGELIST

[59] CHORALE
Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier, O Jesulein, mein Leben;

Here I stand at your manger, O little Jesus, my Life;

See n. 69, above.

Sich wenden here is an archaic synonym for sich endigen (or, sich enden). Psalm 33:10, “The Lord brings the counsel of the heathen to nought; and cuts short the plans of the peoples [Luther: und wendet die Gedanken der Völker].”
Ich komme, bring und schenke dir,
Was du mir hast gegeben.
Nimm hin, es ist mein Geist und Sinn,
Herz, Seel und Mut, nimm alles hin,
Und laß dir's wohlgefallen!

I come to bring and give to you
what you have granted me.
Take this, it is my spirit and inclination,
heart, soul and courage; take this all,
and let it please you greatly!

And God commanded them in a dream that they should not direct themselves back to Herod, and [they] set off by another way back to their country.

So geht! Genug, mein Schatz geht nicht von hier,
Er bleibt da bei mir;
Ich will ihn auch nicht von mir lassen.
Sein Arm wird mich aus Lieb
Mit sanftmutsvollem Trieb
Und größter Zärtlichkeit umfassen;
Er soll mein Bräutigam verbleiben,
Ich will ihm Brust und Herz verschreiben.
Ich weiß gewiß, er liebet mich,

So go! [It is] enough that my Treasure will not go from here;
he stays with me;
I will also not let him [free] from me.

His arm will embrace me out of love with gentle desire and greatest tenderness;
he shall remain my bridegroom;
I will entrust breast and heart to him.
I know for certain that he loves me;

75 Hebrews 4:12, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces until it separates soul and spirit [Luther: Geist] . . . and is a judge of the thoughts and inclinations of the heart [Sinnen des Herzen]."

76 The Greek text in Luke does not specify "God," but understanding Luke's "he" to mean God makes good sense; the Proteevangelium of James (a noncanonical gospel) says an angel gave the warning. According to certain ancient rabbinic teachings, God does not communicate to the gentiles in the daytime.

77 Song of Songs 3:4, "I hold him, and will not let him go [Luther: Ich halte ihn, und will ihn nicht [los]lassen]."

78 Luke 1:51, "He exercises dominion with his arm [Luther: er übet Gewalt mit seinem Arm]."
Mein Herz liebt ihn auch
inniglich
Und wird ihn ewig ehren.
Was könnte mich nun für ein
Feind
Bei solchem Glück versehren!
Du, Jesu, bist und bleibst mein
Freund;
Und werd ich ängstlich zu dir
fliehn:
Herr, hilf, so laß mich Hülfe
sehn!

[62] ARIA
Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde
schrecken;
Was könnt ihr mir für Furcht
erwecken?
Mein Schatz, mein Hort ist hier
bei mir!
Ihr mögt euch noch so
grimmig stellen,
Droht nur, mich ganz und
gar zu
fallen,
Doch seht! mein Heiland
wohnet hier.

[63] RECITATIVE
Was will der Hölle Schrecken
nun,
Was will uns Welt und Sünde
tun,
Da wir in Jesu Händen ruhn!

[64] CHORALE
Nun seid ihr wohl gerochen
An eurer Feinde Schar,
Denn Christus hat zerbrochen,

my heart also loves him
deeply
and will honor him eternally.
Now, at such good fortune,
how could any enemy
harm me!
You, Jesus, are and remain my
friend;
and if I anxiously beseech you:
"Lord, save [me]!," then let
me see salvation!

Now you insolent enemies
might horrify;
[yet] how could you arouse any
fear in me?
My Treasure, my Refuge is here
with me!
You do still so like to feign
being fierce;
just [go ahead and]
threaten to bring me
down completely;
but look! my Savior dwells
here.

What will the horrors of hell
intend now,
what will World and Sin intend
to do to us,
since we rest in Jesus’ hands!

Now you all are well avenged
of your band of enemies,
for Christ has broken apart

Psalm 55:2,5 (Luther and Tanakh; 55:1,4 in other Bibles), “God . . . do not hide your-
self from my beseeching [Luther: flehn] . . . my heart is in anguish within my body [Luther:
mein Herz ängstet sich in meinem Leibe].”

Psalm 118:25, “O Lord, save [us]; O Lord, let well-being prosper [Luther: O HErr,
hilf, o HErr, laß Wohl gelingen]!”

See n. 69, above.
Was euch zuwider war.
Tod, Teufel, Sünd und Hölle
Sind ganz und gar geschwächt;
Bei Gott hat seine Stelle
Das menschliche Geschlecht.

what was against you.
Death, devil, sin, and hell
are completely diminished;
the human family
has its place by God.