

“Himmelskönig, sei willkommen” BWV 182

1. Sonata

2. Himmelskönig, sei willkommen,
Lass auch uns dein Zion sein!
Komm herein,
Du hast uns das Herz genommen.¹

3. *Siehe, ich komme, im Buch ist von mir
geschrieben: deinen Willen, mein Gott, tu ich
gerne.*⁵

4. Starkes Lieben,

1. Sonata

2. Welcome, king of heaven;²
Let us, too, be your Zion.³
Come in;
You have captured our heart.⁴

3. *Look, I [Jesus]⁶ come; in the book [of holy scripture] is
written of me: Your will, my God, I do gladly.*

4. [It was a] strong act of love⁷

GENERAL NOTE: Details of the performing parts Bach used in Weimar suggest that he had also envisioned (but most probably abandoned) the possibility there on later occasions of dropping movements 7 and 8 and closing instead with a repeat of movement 2. Details of the new set of performing parts he used in Leipzig suggest that he did omit movement 7 there on some occasions.

¹As in several aria texts from his Weimar cantatas, Bach included the text of the libretto’s A section in the B section of his musical setting.

²In older German, “Himmelskönig” (“king of heaven”) is a standard title for Jesus, God’s anointed royal messiah. The eternal marriage partner of the Himmelskönig, however, is not the “Himmelskönigin” (“queen of heaven,” i.e., which is a standard title for Mary, the mother of Jesus); it is “Zion,” understood to be both the Christian soul (who is mentioned in movement 7, below) and the entire group of Christian souls, namely the church, which is foreshadowed by the “Braut” (“bride”) whose heart the king captures in Song of Songs 4:9 (see fn. 4, below).

³Zechariah 9:9 reads “du, Tochter Zion, freue dich sehr, ... dein König kommt zu dir” (“rejoice greatly you daughter Zion, your king comes to you”). The “king” and “Zion” and were understood in Christian interpretation to be a foreshadowing of Jesus and of his followers, as was already partly suggested by the quotation of Zechariah 9:9 in Matthew 21:5. The libretto prays that “us” Lutherans performing and listening to this cantata will be included, too, in God’s eternally blessed “Zion.”

⁴This is a reversed play on Song of Songs 4:9 in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Du hast mir das Herz genommen, ... liebe Braut” (“You have captured my heart, dear bride”). The “bride” and the “bridegroom” king of the Song of Songs were traditionally understood in Christian interpretation to be a foreshadowing of the church and Jesus, who would be “wed” at the end time. The Christian heart is the dwelling place that the cantata text is asking Jesus to enter.

⁵Psalms 40:8-9 in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day.

⁶In Christian interpretation, the “I” of Psalm 40 (which contains the superscription “A psalm of [King] David [of Israel]”), is the voice of the new anointed King “David,” Jesus. This psalm passage is quoted twice in the New Testament within Hebrews 10:1-10, where the psalm is understood to proclaim that scripture had prophesied that Jesus would gladly accept God’s will by dying in sacrifice on the cross. The intended meaning of the Hebrew text in Psalm 40 and of its quotation in Greek in Hebrews 10 are uncertain, in different ways, but Luther harmonized both passages in a manner that sweeps their interpretive difficulties under the carpet.

⁷The grammar of “starkes Lieben” makes this a “strong act of love” on the part of Jesus himself rather than God the father’s “strong love” for humanity that drives Jesus from the throne (which would have been “starke Liebe”).

Das dich, grosser Gottessohn,
Von dem Thron
Deiner Herrlichkeit getrieben.
Starkes Lieben,
Dass du dich zum Heil der Welt
Als ein Opfer fürgestellt,
Dass du dich mit Blut verschrieben.

That impelled you, great son of God,
From the throne
Of your glory.⁸
[A] strong act of love [it was],
That you set yourself forth
As a sacrifice, for the salvation of the world;
That with blood you committed yourself [to salvation].

5. Leget euch dem Heiland unter,
Herzen, die ihr christlich seid!
Tragt ein unbeflecktes Kleid
Eures Glaubens ihm entgegen,
Leib und Leben und Vermögen
Sei dem König itzt geweiht.

5. Lay yourselves [as “garments”]⁹ beneath the savior,
You hearts that are Christian.¹⁰
Offer up¹¹ a spotless garment
Of your faith to him;
Let body and life and means¹²
Now be consecrated to the king.

6. Jesu, lass durch Wohl und Weh
Mich auch mit dir ziehen!
Schreit die Welt nur Kreuzige,
So lass mich nicht fliehen,

6. Jesus, through weal and woe
Let me, too,¹⁴ go with you.
If the world cries only “crucify,”

⁸In the absence of close familiarity with biblical language, the talk here of Jesus being impelled from a throne of glory will seem cryptic. In the New Testament, Jesus is implicitly hailed as the personification of God’s wisdom and, likewise implicitly, as being of the same essence as God the Father. Wisdom 9:10 was read in this light, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day was rendered “Sende sie herab von deinem heiligen Himmel, und aus dem Thron deiner Herrlichkeit sende sie, dass sie bei mir sei und mit mir arbeite” (“Send her [the personification of wisdom] down from your holy heaven; and off the throne of your glory send her, that she may be with me and may labor with me”). This was interpreted to mean that the personification of wisdom was sent by God, out of eternity into time, to become the flesh of Jesus and to do the “labor” of sacrificially dying on the cross, as an act of Jesus’s love for humanity.

⁹This line is playing with the language of Matthew 21:7-8, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “[Die Jünger] brachten die Eselin, und das Füllen, und legten ihre Kleider darauf, und satzten ihn darauf; aber viel Volks breitete die Kleider auf den Weg” (“The disciples of Jesus brought the donkey, and the colt, and laid their garments on them, and sat him [Jesus] on them; but many of the people spread their garments [as before a king] on the path [where Jesus was riding into Jerusalem]”).

¹⁰“Christlich” does not mean “Christ-like” (i.e., to be like Christ). It means to be like others who follow Christ (i.e., to be “Christian”).

¹¹The separable verb “entgegengetragen” is an archaic expression for “antragen” (“to offer up”). Pure hearts, of Christian faith, are being likened here to the “garments” that were offered up to Jesus in Matthew 21:1-9.

¹²The word “Vermögen,” in the present context, could be singular or plural, and its sense could have to do with human “abilities” or material “possessions,” or both. It is rendered here as “means,” because this solution seems to cover both senses and because this English word, plural in form but singular or plural in construction, works as a translation of the singular “[das] Vermögen” as well as of the plural “[die] Vermögen.” It is possible, though unlikely, that the word “Leben” in this line of poetry is likewise plural; and it is possible, though rather unlikely, that “Leib” is to be read as the plural “Leiber” with the “er” syllable poetically clipped off. Note, however, that the German expression “Leib und Leben” corresponds to the English expression “life and limb.”

¹⁴That is, “let me, too (like your immediate disciples), go with you.” In John 11:16, Thomas says to the other disciples of Jesus, in the rendering from the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Lasst uns mit ziehen, dass wir mit ihm sterben” (“Let’s go with [Jesus], that we may die with him”).

Herr, von¹³ deinem Kreuzpanier;
Kron und Palmen find ich hier.

Let me not bolt,¹⁵
Lord, from your banner of the cross;¹⁶
Crown and palms¹⁷ will I find here.

**7. Jesu, deine Passion
Ist mir lauter Freude,
Deine Wunden, Kron und Hohn
Meines Herzens Weide;
Meine Seel auf Rosen geht,
Wenn ich dran gedenke,
In dem Himmel eine Stätt,
Uns deswegen schenke.¹⁸**

**7. Jesus, your Passion
Is pure joy to me;
Your wounds, crown [of thorns],¹⁹ and scorn
[Are] my heart's pasture;
My soul walks on roses
When I reflect on it [your Passion];
Grant us a place in heaven
Because of it.**

8. So lasset uns gehen in Salem der Freuden,
Begleitet den König in Lieben und Leiden,
Er gehet voran
Und öffnet die Bahn.

8. So let us go into the Jerusalem²⁰ of joy,²¹
Accompany the king in love and suffering;
He goes on ahead
And opens up the pathway [for us].

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)

¹³Several editions of the cantata give “fliehen ... vor” (here, “flee from” in the sense of “flee in the face of”), but the original Bach sources clearly read “fliehen ... von” (“flee from” in the sense of “bolt from”).

¹⁵It might not seem to make sense for a Christian to “flee” from a banner of the cross of Jesus. This line assumes knowledge of Mark 14:50 and Matthew 26:56, which say that when a crowd came to seize Jesus (leading to his crucifixion), all his disciples “*forsook him and fled* [the scene].” See also fn. 14, above, about the intention to follow Jesus. The prayer of the cantata line is that “I” will not forsake the cross by fleeing from the scene of battle.

¹⁶The “Kreuzpanier” is a battle flag decorated with the sign of the cross of Jesus that was carried in the crusades (the general notion of this banner was believed to be foreshadowed in Isaiah 11:10). The banner appears here as symbol for the cross of Jesus, and cross-bearing in turn was understood to be a metaphor for general Christian suffering.

¹⁷In Revelation 2:10, the glorious “crown of [eternal] life” is associated with Christian salvation (via the sacrificial death of the lamb of God, Jesus, on the cross). Likewise, in Revelation 7:9, branches of palm trees are associated with Christian salvation; in Lutheran interpretation, these palms were thought to be symbols of victory (over death).

¹⁸A stanza of “Jesu, Leiden, Pein und Tod.”

¹⁹This “crown” refers to the agonizing “crown of thorns” that Jesus wears at his crucifixion (Matthew 27:29, Mark 15:17, John 19:2).

²⁰“Salem” is the locality where Melchizedek was king, according to Genesis 14:18. Salem is traditionally identified with Jerusalem, in part because of the parallelism between “Zion” and “Salem” in Psalm 76:2. Hebrews 5:10 says that Jesus was designated by God to be a (sacrifice-administering) high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

²¹Here the “n” in “Freuden” is probably an old-fashioned singular genitive ending, not plural. The “Jerusalem of joy” is the “heavenly Jerusalem” of Hebrews 12:22.



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