

“Darzu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes” BWV 40

1. Darzu ist erschienen der Sohn Gottes, dass er
die Werke des Teufels zerstöre.¹

*For this the son of God appeared, that he may destroy the works of
the devil.*

2. Das Wort ward Fleisch und wohnet in der Welt,
Das Licht der Welt bestrahlt den Kreis der Erden,
Der grosse Gottessohn
Verlässt des Himmels Thron,
Und seiner Majestät gefällt,
Ein kleines Menschenkind zu werden.
Bedenkt doch diesen Tausch, wer nur gedenken
kann;

The word [of God]² became flesh and dwells in the world,
The light of the world³ illuminates the vault of the earth⁴;
The great son of God
Leaves heaven's throne
And it pleases his majesty
To become a little child of humankind.
Consider indeed this exchange, whoever is but able to be mindful [of
it]:

Der König wird ein Untertan,
Der Herr erscheint als ein Knecht
Und wird dem menschlichen Geschlecht
— O süßes Wort in aller Ohren! —
Zu Trost und Heil geboren.

The king becomes a subject;
The Lord appears as a servant,
And is born for comfort and salvation
To the human race —
Oh sweet word in every ear!

**3. Die Sünd macht Leid;
Christus bringt Freud,
Weil er zu Trost in diese Welt ist kommen.
Mit uns ist Gott
Nun in der Not:
Wer ist, der uns als Christen kann
verdammen?**⁵

**Sin makes sorrow;
Christ brings joy,
For he has come into this world for comfort.
God is with us
Now, in our need;
Who is there who can condemn us as Christians?**

4. Höllische Schlange,
Wird dir nicht bange?
Der dir den Kopf als ein Sieger zerknickt,
Ist nun geboren,

Hellish serpent [Satan],
Are you not afraid?
He [Jesus] who will snap off your head as a victor
Has now been born,⁶

¹John 3:8.

²John 1:14 states that “the logos/word of God” comes (from heaven) to become the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth.

³Jesus is called “the light of the world,” as a sort of title, in John 8:12 and 9:5.

⁴“Kreis der Erden” refers here not to the earth itself as a globe but to the visible horizon, which biblically (e.g., Proverbs 8:27) was pictured as a circle engraved at the join of heaven and earth; the earth itself, however, was thought to be flat. God sits upon the horizon, or vault, as one of his thrones, according to Isaiah 40:22, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day is rendered “Er sitzt auf dem Kreis der Erde” (“He [God] sits [as a monarch, enthroned] upon the vault of the earth”); that is, God sits atop the arched rim of the horizon, with the flat earth itself below his feet. Bach’s audiences knew, of course, that the world was round; the point here in the cantata is that Jesus, the word, the son of God, leaves the majesty of God’s various thrones, including the biblical one at “the vault of the earth,” to become a humble subject.

⁵A stanza of “Wir Christenleut hab’n jetztund Freud.”

⁶The full sense of the language of movements 4 and 5 comes from the creation narratives in the Bible. In Genesis 3, the first humans, Adam and Eve, disobey God by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When confronted by God, Adam says Eve gave him to eat, and Eve says that she was duped by a serpent into eating. In 3:15, God says to the serpent, in the rendering of the Luther’s Bibles of Bach’s day, “Ich will Feindschaft setzen zwischen dir und dem Weibe und zwischen deinem Samen und ihrem Samen. Derselbige soll dir den Kopf zertreten, und du wirst ihn in die Fersen stechen” (“I will put enmity between you and the woman [Eve] and between your seed and her seed. This same [seed] shall trample your head, and you will sting him in the heels”). In traditional Christian reading, the serpent is the devil/Satan (hence the cantata’s expression “hellish serpent”). In Lutheran reading, the seed of Eve who tramples Satan’s head is Jesus, and the stinging of the seed’s heels refers to Satan’s persecuting Christ and his followers, including in the crucifixion of Jesus. The word “seed” in “her seed” is grammatically masculine singular in the original Hebrew and in Luther’s German, but this offspring could, technically, be read as corporate or singular. In contrast, the Vulgate (the Latin Bible) and the standard English translation of it, the Douay-Rheims Bible, render the offspring as feminine (“I will put enmities

Und die verloren,
Werden mit ewigem Frieden beglückt.

And those who are lost
Will be favored with eternal peace.

5. Die Schlange, so im Paradies
Auf alle Adamskinder
Das Gift der Seelen fallen liess,
Bringt uns nicht mehr Gefahr;
Des Weibes Samen stellt sich dar,
Der Heiland ist ins Fleisch gekommen
Und hat ihr allen Gift benommen.
Drum sei getrost! betrübter Sünder.

The serpent, who in paradise
Dropped the poison of the soul⁷
On all the children of Adam,
No longer brings us danger;
The woman's [Eve's] seed [Jesus] presents himself;⁸
The savior has come in the flesh
And has taken away all its poison.
So be comforted, afflicted sinner.

**6. Schüttele deinen Kopf und sprich:
Fleuch, du alte Schlange!
Was erneurst du deinen Stich,
Machst mir angst und bange?
Ist dir doch der Kopf zerknickt,
Und ich bin durchs Leiden
Meines Heilands dir entrückt
In den Saal der Freuden.**⁹

**Shake your head and say:
Flee, you ancient serpent.**¹⁰
**Why do you renew your sting,
Make me anxious and afraid?
Your head is indeed snapped,**¹¹
**And through the suffering
Of my savior I am snatched up**¹² **from you
Into the hall of joy**¹³ **[in heaven].**

7. Christenkinder, freuet euch!
Wütet schon das Höllenreich,
Will euch Satans Grimm erschrecken:
Jesus, der erretten kann,
Nimmt sich seiner Küchlein an
Und will sie mit Flügeln decken.

Christian children, rejoice.
If the kingdom of hell yet rages,
If Satan's fury will terrify you,
Jesus, who can save,
Attends to his chicks [like a hen]
And will cover them with [her] wings.¹⁴

**8. Jesu, nimm dich deiner Glieder
Ferner in Genaden an;**

Jesus, attend to your members¹⁶ **[the church]
Henceforth**¹⁷ **in mercy;**

between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she [i.e., her seed] shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel"), and this allows for taking the "seed" of Eve to be not Jesus but his mother, Mary, an interpretation considered by Lutheranism to be a Roman Catholic error.

⁷The "poison" (or "bane") of the soul is sin. Here the "n" in "Seelen" is probably an old-fashioned singular genitive ending, not plural.

⁸Regarding the identity of Eve's "seed," see the note about Genesis 3:15, above, at line 4 of movement 4.

⁹A stanza of "Schwing dich auf zu deinem Gott."

¹⁰The devil, Satan, is called "the ancient serpent" in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2.

¹¹As had been prophesied. See line 3 from movement 4.

¹²"Entrücken" is a verb Luther uses for the act of being "raptured" or suddenly "snatched up" or "caught up" from earth into heaven (e.g., in his rendering of Revelation 12:5).

¹³Here the "n" in "Freuden" is probably an old-fashioned singular genitive ending, not plural.

¹⁴In Lutheranism, this was a favorite image of Jesus, derived from Matthew 23:37-39 and Luke 13:34-35. It was understood as a metaphor for God the son's protecting his followers from the wrath of God the Father.

¹⁶The New Testament continually refers to the Christian community, or the church, as "the members of the body of Christ" (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:27), such that Jesus is this body's "head" (e.g., Colossians 1:18).

¹⁷Or "further"; in Christmas and New Year's texts, "ferner" often implies "in the year to come."

**Schenke, was man bitten kann,
Zu erquicken deine Brüder:
Gib der ganzen Christenschar
Frieden und ein selges Jahr!
Freude, Freude über Freude!
Christus wehret allem Leide.
Wonne, Wonne über Wonne!
Er ist die Genadensonne.¹⁵**

**Send that which can be asked
To refresh your brothers¹⁸ [the church].
Give the whole Christian flock¹⁹
Peace and a blessed year.
Joy, joy upon joy!
Christ bars all sorrow.
Bliss, bliss upon bliss!
He is the merciful sun.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV40> for an annotated translation

¹⁵A stanza of “Freuet euch, ihr Christen alle.”

¹⁸“Brothers” is used extremely frequently in the New Testament as a term for “believers in Jesus.”

¹⁹“Die Schar” can also mean “host,” with military implications, but the common alternative sense of “flock” seems more appropriate to the context here.