

"Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland" BWV 61

**1. Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland,
Der Jungfrauen Kind erkannt,
Des sich wundert alle Welt,
Gott solch Geburt ihm bestellt.¹**

2. Der Heiland ist gekommen,
Hat unser armes Fleisch
Und Blut an sich genommen
Und nimmet uns zu Blutsverwandten an.
O allerhöchstes Gut,
Was hast du nicht an uns getan?
Was tust du nicht
Noch täglich an den Deinen?
Du kömst und lässt dein Licht
Mit vollem Segen scheinen.

3. Komm, Jesu, komm zu deiner Kirche
Und gib ein selig neues Jahr!
Befördre deines Namens Ehre,
Erhalte die gesunde Lehre
Und segne Kanzel und Altar!

4. *Siehe, ich stehe vor der Tür und klopfe an. So jemand
meine Stimme hören wird und die Tür auf tun, zu dem
werde ich eingehen und das Abendmahl mit ihm halten*

**1. Now come, savior of the gentiles,
Known as child of the virgin;
Of this, all the world marvels:
God ordained him such a birth.**

2. The savior has come [from eternity];
Has taken on our wretched [temporal]² flesh
And blood upon himself;³
And takes us on as blood relatives.
Oh Most-High⁴ possession,
What have you not done for us?
What do you not
Still daily do for your own [people]?
You come and let your light
Shine⁵ with full blessing [of the gospel].⁶

3. Come, Jesus, come to your church
And grant a blessed new year.⁷
Promote your name's honor,
Uphold the sound teaching [of your church],
And bless pulpit and altar.

4. *Look, I stand before the door and knock. If anyone ends
up hearing my voice and opening the door, I will go in, to
him, and keep the Lord's Supper with him, and he with*

¹First stanza of "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland."

²In Bach's traditional Lutheranism, God's Messiah, Jesus, the Second Person of the (eternal) Trinity, is said to come from (eternal) heaven to (temporal) earth in three physical "advents." The first advent is his human birth as a child of the virgin Mary of Nazareth; the second advent is his physical presence "in," "with," and "among/under" (in German: "in, mit und unter") the elements of bread and wine in the church's sacrament of communion ("the Lord's Supper"); and the third advent is his coming back at the End Time to judge the living and the dead (which in most Christian traditions is called "the Second Coming").

³The content of this poetry is based generally on John 1:14, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "Das Wort ward Fleisch und wohnete unter uns" ("The [eternal] Word [of God] became [the] flesh [of the body of Jesus] and dwelled [temporally] among us [humans here on earth]").

⁴This recitative most probably speaks not so much of a "very highest good" or "very highest possession" but of a "Most-High good" or "Most-High possession." Its lines allude in part to Sirach 3:21 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "Der HERR ist der Allerhöchste, und tut doch grosse Dinge durch die Demütigen" ("The LORD is the Most High, and indeed does great things through the humble"). For the phrase "What have you not done for us," see also Psalm 126:3.

⁵The verb "scheinen" here means not "to appear" but "to shine," as is evident from its allusion to John 1:5, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "[Jesus, der Heiland, ist] das Licht [das] scheint in der Finsternis" ("[Jesus, the Savior, is] the light [that] shines in the darkness").

⁶A reference to Romans 15:29, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "Ich komme . . . mit vollem Segen des Evangeliums" ("I come . . . with full blessing of the gospel").

⁷The prayer for "a blessed new year" refers not to the calendar year but to the "church year" (or, "liturgical year"), the annual cycle of seasons and days observed in the Lutheran liturgy in commemoration of the sequence of events narrated in the Bible about Jesus and his followers. This cantata was designated for the First Sunday in Advent (four Sundays before Christmas), the liturgical occasion that marked the beginning of each new Lutheran church year.

und er mit mir.

5. Öffne dich, mein ganzes Herze,
Jesus kömmt und ziehet ein.
Bin ich gleich nur Staub und Erde,
Will er mich doch nicht verschmähn,
Seine Lust an mir zu sehn,⁹
Dass ich seine Wohnung werde.
O wie selig werd ich sein!

6. Amen, amen!
Komm, du schöne Freudenkrone,
Bleib nicht lange!
Deiner wart ich mit Verlangen.¹²

Erdmann Neumeister

*me.*⁸

5. Open yourself,¹⁰ my whole heart;
Jesus comes and enters [God's "temple," my heart].¹¹
Even though I am but dust and earth,
He will, nevertheless, not disdain me;
He will look upon his delight in me,
That I may become his dwelling-place.
O how blessed will I be!

6. Amen, amen!
Come, you beautiful crown of joy,
Tarry not long!
[Exceedingly fair bridegroom, Jesus]¹³ I wait for you
with longing.

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)

⁸This movement is a setting of Revelation 3:20, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day. In and of itself, the word "Abendmahl" can refer either simply to a quotidian "supper" (literally, "evening meal") or it can refer to "the Lord's Supper," the sacrament of bread-eating and wine-drinking observed in Christian worship, which is understood to be a foreshadowing of the Church's meal-sharing with Jesus at the End Time. In Luther's rendering of Revelation 3:20, Jesus says that he will "*keep* the Abendmahl." The Luther Bible introduces the verb "keep" (which is not found in the original Greek source-texts) and links it with "supper" whenever Luther evidently wants to make explicit a connection to the sacrament.

⁹That is, the sense here is: "Er will seine Lust an mir zusehen" ("He wants to look upon his delight in me").

¹⁰The understanding would be that it is God who makes it possible for the heart to be opened to Jesus, the "Word" of God. See, for example, Acts 16:14, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "ein Gottfürchtiges Weib, mit Namen Lydia . . . hörete zu, welcher tat der HERR das Herze auf, daß sie darauf acht hatte, was von Paulo geredet ward" ("A God-fearing woman by the name of Lydia . . . was listening, whose heart the LORD opened, so that she gave attention to what was being spoken by [the Apostle] Paul").

¹¹This use of "ziehet ein" is most probably meant to call to mind the language of The Entry of Christ ("Einzug Christi") into Jerusalem and Cleansing of the Temple passages in Matthew 21:1-17—Luther's German text of verse 10 reads, "als er zu Jerusalem einzog . . ." ("when [Jesus] entered unto Jerusalem . . ."). A person's body is also a temple of God, according to 1 Corinthians 6:19, and Jesus, the Word, comes to enter this "dwelling" ("Wohnung") and purify it as well, much as he "cleanses" the Jerusalem Temple—the dwelling-place of God—of its money-changers who Jesus says have made the Temple into what he calls (in Luther's rendering) a "den of murderers" ("Mördergrube," Matthew 21:13).

¹²Last lines of a stanza of "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern." Cantata 61's librettist is sometimes now criticized for having abnormally "mutilated" this hymn by employing only the second half of the stanza, but a somewhat similar practice for this hymn is also found in several other baroque vocal works. Presumably the altered stanza at the end of Cantata 61 was meant to function as a more powerful doxology for the cantata. "Amen and Amen" appears at the end of the blessings or doxologies marking the division of the Psalms into the first three of its Books I–V (at the conclusions of Psalms 41, 72, and 89). Luther rendered these passages as "Amen, amen," and Cantata 61's closing movement echoes this striking biblical idiom. This half stanza also focuses on the language of Song of Songs—King Solomon's crown, wedding, and joy of heart are commended in Song of Songs 3:11—setting up the wedding imagery associated with the third advent (see n. 2 above).

¹³The antecedent for this "you" and for the metaphorical "crown of joy" would have been understood as "dem wunderschönen Bräutigam mein" ("the exceedingly fair bridegroom of mine"), Jesus, who is spoken of in the previous stanza of this well-known hymn. The traditional idea of Jesus as the Christian believer's End-Time "bridegroom" is derived from interpretation of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (in Matthew 25:1-13). Furthermore, Bach's intended listeners may have been expected to know that the words of Jesus from Revelation 3:20 in movement 4 had been introduced in 3:14 with "Das saget Amen, . . . der Anfang der Creatur GOTTES" ("This [is what the personification of] 'Amen' says, [he who is] the origin of God's creation [according to John 1:1-3]"). Because "Amen" was used in Revelation 3 as a name or title for Jesus, the double Amen at the beginning of movement 6 can be understood, in the context of this libretto, not only as an affirmation but also as an invocation.



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