

“Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland” BWV 62

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

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

2. Bewundert, o Menschen, dies grosse Geheimnis:  
Der höchste Beherrscher erscheint der Welt.  
Hier werden die Schätze des Himmels entdeckt,  
Hier wird uns ein göttliches Manna bestellt,  
O Wunder! die Keuschheit wird gar nicht beflecket.

2. Marvel, O people, at this great mystery:  
The supreme ruler appears to the world.<sup>1</sup>  
Here the treasures of heaven are revealed,<sup>2</sup>  
Here a divine manna<sup>3</sup> [Jesus]<sup>4</sup> is ordained for us,  
O miracle! The chastity [of Mary]<sup>5</sup> is completely  
untainted.

3. So geht aus Gottes Herrlichkeit und Thron  
Sein eingeborner Sohn.  
Der Held aus Juda bricht herein,  
Den Weg mit Freudigkeit zu laufen  
Und uns Gefallne zu erkaufen.  
O heller Glanz, o wunderbarer Segensschein!

3. In this way, from God’s glory and throne, goes forth  
His only-begotten<sup>6</sup> son [Jesus]—  
The hero from Judah breaks in [to the world, from heaven,]  
To run the course [of salvation],<sup>7</sup> with gladness,  
And to purchase<sup>8</sup> us fallen [sin-stained] ones.

GENERAL NOTE: Movements 1 and 6 take their texts verbatim from the outer stanzas of the hymn “Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland.” The remaining movements paraphrase the content of the inner stanzas.

<sup>1</sup>The great mystery here is that the divine ruler appears in the form of a human child.

<sup>2</sup>“Entdecken” is used here in its older German sense as a synonym for “abdecken” (“uncover,” “reveal”).

<sup>3</sup>“Manna” is a food that God in Exodus 16 provides as “bread from the skies/heavens” (Hebrew, “lechem min hashamayim”) for Israel in the wilderness during their exodus from slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. In John 6:25-59, the term “manna” contrasts with “the *true* bread from heaven” (Greek, “arton ek tou ouranou ton alethinon”) that Jesus provides, which is said to confer *eternal* life. It is this “true bread *from heaven*”—i.e., from the abode of God, traditionally regarded as being beyond the sky—that the cantata poetry is referring to with the expression “*divine* manna.” See also fn. 4, below.

<sup>4</sup>In John 6:35 and 6:48, Jesus says “Ich bin das Brot des Lebens” (“I am the bread of [eternal] life”). See also fn. 3, above.

<sup>5</sup>This line about “Keuschheit” (“chastity”) reflects the biblical conviction, in Luke 1:35, that Jesus was conceived by his mother, Mary of Nazareth, not through sexual intercourse (which would have tainted her chastity, as she was at that time of conception still unmarried) but through “the [miraculous] power of the Most High [God].”

<sup>6</sup>The word “eingeborne” can be somewhat ambiguous, in the same ways that the various biblical terms underlying it are ambiguous: they all can mean “only-born” (that is, by the woman who gives birth) or “only-begotten” (of the human couple, or of the woman, or of the human male). Thus, English translators have traditionally rendered the biblical terms behind Luther’s various grammatical forms of “gebären” as “to beget” when a male progenitor is the subject, and as “to bear” or “to give birth to” when a female progenitor is the subject. As *God’s* “only-begotten,” Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, is singular in his manner of existence: in traditional Christian doctrine, he is proclaimed as eternally “begotten” of God the father, not temporally made or created. See also fn. 18, below.

<sup>7</sup>This line derives its language from Luther’s rendering of Psalm 19:6, which Luther interpreted as a prediction of Jesus as the one who “freut sich wie ein Held zu laufen den Weg” (“is glad like a hero running the [race-]path/course”). The implication taken for granted in the Psalm, as in the cantata, is that the “Weg” that Jesus runs is “der Weg der Seligkeit” (“the path/course/way of blessing/salvation,” a well-known expression from Acts 16:17, usually rendered in English as “the way of salvation”). More specifically, it is also taken for granted (as specified in part of stanza 5 of the hymn, which is not paraphrased in this cantata libretto) that the “path” on which Jesus “runs” refers to the coming-and-going described in John 16:28, “Ich bin vom Vater ausgegangen, und kommen in die Welt; wiederum verlasse ich die Welt, und gehe zum Vater” (“I [Jesus] have gone out from [God] the father [in heaven], and come into the world; in turn [after my suffering, death, and resurrection], I am leaving the world, and am going to [God] the father”).

<sup>8</sup>The language and sense of this line is derived from Revelation 5:9, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day usually reads “du ... hast uns erkauf mit deinem Blut” (“you [the Lamb of God, Jesus] have purchased [for God] us [Christian sinners] with your blood [on the cross]”); some Luther Bibles of Bach’s day do read “du ... hast uns *für* Gott erkauf mit deinem Blut” (“you have purchased us *for God* with your blood”). Whatever the reading, the image here is Jesus’s purchasing of forgiveness/salvation for the sinner both from and for God.

O bright splendor, O marvelous luminosity<sup>9</sup> of blessing/salvation!

4. Streite, siege, starker Held!  
Sei vor uns im Fleische kräftig!  
Sei geschäftig,  
Das Vermögen in uns Schwachen  
Stark zu machen!

4. Fight, win, strong hero!  
Be, in the flesh,<sup>10</sup> mighty for us.  
Be diligent  
In making  
The power<sup>11</sup> in us weak ones strong.

5. Wir ehren diese Herrlichkeit  
Und nahen nun zu deiner Krippen  
Und preisen mit erfreuten Lippen,  
Was du uns zubereit;<sup>12</sup>  
Die Dunkelheit verstört<sup>13</sup> uns nicht  
Und sahen<sup>14</sup> dein unendlich Licht.

5. We honor this glory  
And [we] now draw near to your manger  
And laud with gladdened lips  
What you have prepared for us;  
The darkness [of sin] did not destroy us  
And [we] saw [inside our hearts] your unending light.<sup>15</sup>

6. Lob sei Gott, dem Vater, ton,<sup>16</sup>  
Lob sei Gott, sein'm eingen Sohn,

6. Praise be given<sup>17</sup> to God the Father;  
Praise be to God his only<sup>18</sup> Son [Jesus];

<sup>9</sup>The “Segenschein” is not a “sign of blessing” but the “luminosity of blessing (i.e., salvation).” The language and sense of both this line and the hymn stanza that it is paraphrasing here are based on the proclamations about “light” in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “Gott, der da hiess das Licht aus der Finsternis hervorleuchten, der hat einen hellen Schein in unsere Herzen gegeben” (“God, who there [at Creation, in Genesis 1:3-4] bid the light shine forth out of the darkness, [he] who has imparted a bright luminosity inside our hearts”). This “bright luminosity” is meant to be identified with “das helle Licht des Evangeliums” (“the bright light of the gospel”), i.e., the good news of Christian salvation, in 2 Corinthians 4:4.

<sup>10</sup>“In the flesh” is a biblical expression that here refers not to the (sinful, carnal-minded) human nature of fallen humanity but to the (in this case sinless) human nature taken on, in Jesus, by God’s pre-existent, divine “Word/Logos” so that he, Jesus, the “son of God,” can conquer sin, death, and hell. In John 1:14, Jesus is called “das [ewige] Wort [Gottes, der] ward [zeitliches] Fleisch und wohnte unter uns, und wir sahen seine Herrlichkeit, eine Herrlichkeit als des eingeborenen Sohnes vom Vater” (“the [eternal] Word [of God who] became [temporal] flesh and lived among us; and we saw his glory, a glory as of the [i.e., not ‘as if of the,’ but ‘in the quality of the’] only-begotten Son from [God] the Father”).

<sup>11</sup>“Vermögen” seems to be used here as a synonym for “Kraft” (“[spiritual] power”), which is the way the word is often used in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day.

<sup>12</sup>A clipped version of “zubereitet” (“prepared”).

<sup>13</sup>Apparently a clipped version of “verstörte,” which can mean either “disturbed/troubled” or “destroyed”; the context here suggests the latter.

<sup>14</sup>This is the reading of Bach’s original score and performing parts, where it may seem like there is only one specified subject attached to both singular (“verstört”) and plural (“sahen”) verb forms, and so some modern editions change the text at the first three syllables of the last line from “Und sahen” (“And saw”) to “Wir sehen” (“we see”) and also add a comma to the end of the penultimate line, yielding the sense “Die Dunkelheit verstört uns nicht, wir sehen dein unendlich Licht” (“The darkness did not destroy us, [and thus] we see your unending light”). But the word “we” is already meant to be understood here anyway, in parallel to earlier lines of this duet recitative: “Wir ehren ... / Und [wir] nahen ... / Und [wir] preisen,” and thus “Und [wir] sahen.”

<sup>15</sup>Regarding the “light of the gospel” that is “imparted inside [believers’] hearts,” see fn. 9, above. The sentiment of the last two lines of this movement is probably also derived in part from 1 John 2:8, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “die Finsternis ist vergangen, und das wahre Licht scheineth jetzt” (“the benightedness/darkness [of sin/unbelief] has passed, and the true light [of God in Jesus] now shines”).

<sup>16</sup>On this use of “ton,” see fn. 17, below.

<sup>17</sup>“Ton” here does not mean “ring out” or “intone”; i.e., it is not related to the musical senses of the noun “der Ton” (“note,” “tone,” or “sound”). This “ton” is an archaic, clipped version of the verb “getan” (the past tense of “tun” [“to do”]). Here “Lob sei ... getan” is to be understood in the sense of “Lob sei in der Tat gegeben” (“praise be given, in express/enacted deed”). In the hymnbooks of Bach’s day, this word reads “gthon” (i.e., “g’thon,” a clipped version of “gethon” [“gethan”/“getan”]), but in the original Bach sources for this cantata, the text reads simply “thon.”

<sup>18</sup>Often in German (as, e.g., in line 2 of movement 3, above—see also fn. 6, above), Jesus is referred to as God’s “eingeborener Sohn” (“only-begotten son”). The expression “*ein[i]gen Sohn*,” applied to Jesus, however, means not “only-begotten son,” as it is often rendered in English, but “[one-and-]only son”; i.e., the expression “only son” speaks of the son’s uniqueness, not yet to how

**Lob sei Gott, dem Heiligen Geist,  
Immer und in Ewigkeit!**

**Praise be to God the Holy Spirit;  
Ever [here on earth], and [there] in eternity!<sup>19</sup>**



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he is or was generated. Applying “only son” to Jesus here, ironically, stems from Luther’s rendering of the Nicene Creed, an ancient core statement of Christian belief that was strongly focused on the idea that Jesus was in truth not simply an “only son.” In the liturgical books of Bach’s day, the relevant passage reads “Ich glaube ... an einen einigen Herrn Jesum Christum, Gottes einigen Sohn, der vom Vater geboren ist vor der ganzen Welt, ... geboren, nicht geschaffen, mit dem Vater in einerlei Wesen, durch welchen alles geschaffen ist ...” (“I believe in a [one-and-]only Lord Jesus Christ, God’s [one-and-]only Son, who was begotten from [God] the Father before the entire [existence of the] world, ... [eternally] begotten, not [temporally] created, in one-and-the-same essence with [God] the Father, [a (one-and-)only Lord Jesus Christ] through whom everything was created ...”).

<sup>19</sup>“Immer und ewig/ewiglich” was sometimes used in Lutheran discourse as a synonym for “hier und dort” in the sense of “here [on earth, which is temporal] and there [in heaven, which is eternal].”