

"Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme" BWV 140

1. Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme
Der Wächter sehr hoch auf der Zinne,
Wach auf, du Stadt Jerusalem!
Mitternacht heisst diese Stunde;
Sie rufen uns mit hellem Munde:
Wo seid ihr klugen Jungfrauen?
Wohlauf, der Bräutigam kömmt;
Steht auf, die Lampen nehmt!
Alleluja.
Macht euch bereit
Zu der Hochzeit,
Ihr müsset ihm entgegen gehn.¹

1. "Wake up," the voice of the watchmen calls to us
Very high on the pinnacle [of the city wall];
"Wake up, you city of Jerusalem."²
This hour is named midnight;
They call to us, declaiming brightly:
"Where are you, Wise Virgins?"
Cheer up, the bridegroom is coming;
Stand up, take your lamps.
Hallelujah.
Make yourselves ready
For the wedding;
You must go to meet him.

2. Er kommt, er kommt,
Der Bräutigam kommt!
Ihr Töchter Zions, kommt heraus,
Sein Ausgang eilet aus der Höhe
In euer Mutter Haus.
Der Bräutigam kommt, der einem Rehe
Und jungen Hirsche gleich

2. He comes, he comes,
The bridegroom comes!
You Daughters of Zion,³ come forth;
His exodus hastens from on high,⁴
Into your mother's house.⁵
The bridegroom comes, who like a roe
And like a young stag

¹The first stanza of this three-stanza hymn. Both of the other stanzas are also set in this cantata.

²This hymn draws a great deal of its language from the parable, in Matthew 25:1-13, about five Wise and five Foolish Virgins waiting to meet the bridegroom on his wedding day; but only the Wise Virgins end up being able to attend the feast. The parable's feast came to be associated with the great wedding feast predicted to take place at the End Time, when, according to Revelation 19:7-9, the "Lamb [of God]," namely God's Son and Messiah, Jesus, will marry his bride, the Church.

³The group of "you Daughters of Zion" — the "ihr Töchter zu Zion" of Song of Songs 3:11 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day — was understood to be the followers of Jesus, the Church, dwelling in a "spiritual Zion" or "spiritual Jerusalem."

⁴At the words "*Ausgang aus der Höhe*," the librettist appears to be playing with Luke 1:78, from the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "durch die herzliche Barmherzigkeit unsers Gottes, durch welche uns besucht hat der *Aufgang aus der Höhe*" ("through the tenderhearted kindheartedness of our God, through which the [Star-/Sun-]Rise [namely: God's Messiah, Jesus] from on high has visited us"). Regarding the Messianic "star" that "rises" ("geht auf") and that "comes from heaven," see also line 6 from movement 4, below.

⁵The expression "mother's house" comes from Song of Songs 3:4 and 8:2, the dwelling-place to which the narrative's young woman (understood in Christian reading to foreshadow the "bride" spoken of in the New Testament) brings her beloved (understood in Christian reading to foreshadow the "bridegroom" spoken of in the New Testament). The "mother's house" was understood in Christian reading to foreshadow a house located in the heavenly Jerusalem of the End Time (see Revelation 21:10). The heavenly Jerusalem was a metaphorical "mother," according to Galatians 4:26, which proclaims, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, that "das Jerusalem, das droben ist, das ist die Freie; die ist unser aller Mutter" ("the Jerusalem that is above, this is the free-woman, who is mother to all of us [who are followers of Jesus]"). The earthly Jerusalem, however, is said (Galatians 4:24-25) to be a slave-woman.

Auf denen Hügeln springt
Und euch das Mahl der Hochzeit bringt.
Wacht auf, ermuntert euch
Den Bräutigam zu empfangen!
Dort, sehet, kommt er hergegangen.

Leaps upon the mountains,⁶
And brings you the wedding meal.
Wake up, rouse yourselves
To receive the bridegroom.
Look, there he comes along.

3. Seele: Wenn kömmtst du, mein Heil?
Jesus: Ich komme, dein Teil.
S: Ich warte mit brennendem Öle.
S, J: {Eröffne, Ich öffne} den Saal
S & J: Zum himmlischen Mahl,
S: Komm, Jesu!
J: Ich komme; komm, liebliche Seele!

3. Soul: When will you come, my salvation?
Jesus: I am coming, your portion [bestowed by God].⁷
S: I wait with burning oil [in my lamp].⁸
S, J: {Open up, I open} the hall
S & J: For the heavenly meal;
S: Come, Jesus.
J: I am coming; come, lovely Soul.

**4. Zion hört die Wächter singen,
Das Herz tut ihr vor Freuden springen,
Sie wachet und steht eilend auf.
Ihr Freund kommt vom Himmel prächtig,
Von Gnaden stark, von Wahrheit mächtig,
Ihr Licht wird hell, ihr Stern geht auf.
Nun komm, du werthe Kron,
Herr Jesu, Gottes Sohn!
Hosianna!
Wir folgen all
Zum Freudensaal
Und halten mit das Abendmahl.⁹**

**4. Zion¹⁰ hears the watchmen singing;
Her heart takes to leaping for joy;
She wakes and hurriedly stands up.
Her beloved comes from heaven: magnificent,
Strong in grace, mighty in truth;
Her light becomes bright,¹¹ her star rises.¹²
Now come, you valuable crown,
Lord Jesus, God's Son!
Hosanna!¹³
We all follow [God's Son]
To the hall of joy
And join in keeping the Lord's Supper.¹⁴**

⁶The behavior of the young woman's beloved is described in these exact terms in Song of Songs 2:8-9.

⁷A man's enjoying life with the woman he loves (and, presumably, vice versa) is considered a "portion" (Luther Bible, "Teil") bestowed by God, according to Ecclesiastes 9:9. See also Psalm 16:5.

⁸A Wise Virgin's "burning oil" was understood as a metaphor for belief in Jesus.

⁹The second stanza of "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme."

¹⁰"Zion" was understood to be the followers of Jesus, the Church being the group of believers and the "Soul" an individual believer.

¹¹Zion's "light" that becomes "bright" is Jesus, associated in 2 Corinthians 4:4, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, with "das helle Licht des Evangelii" ("the bright light of the gospel").

¹²Zion's "star" that "rises" is Jesus, according to Christian reading of the Messianic prediction in Numbers 24:17, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "Es wird ein Stern aus Jacob aufgehen" ("A star will rise out of [the progeny of] Jacob").

¹³A Hebrew expression, literally meaning "pray, [do] save," employed as an acclamation of praise to God, just as the Hebrew expression *Hallelujah* (literally, "let us praise God") has been adopted into other languages.

¹⁴In 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

5. Jesus: So geh herein zu mir,
 Du mir erwählte Braut!
 Ich habe mich mit dir
 Von Ewigkeit vertraut.
 Dich will ich auf mein Herz,
 Auf meinem Arm gleich wie ein Siegel setzen
 Und dein betrübtes Aug ergötzen.
 Vergiss, o Seele, nun
 Die Angst, den Schmerz,
 Den du erdulden müssen;
 Auf meiner Linken sollst du ruhn,
 Und meine Rechte soll dich küssen.

5. Jesus: So go in, unto me [for the heavenly meal],
 You, my chosen bride.
 I have betrothed myself to you
 Out of eternity.
 I will place you just like a seal upon my heart,
 Just like a seal upon my arm;¹⁵
 And your sad eye I will make joyful.¹⁶
 Forget now, o Soul,
 The fear, the agony
 That you have to endure;
 Upon my left [hand]¹⁷ shall you rest [your head],
 And my right [hand] shall cushion¹⁸ you.

6. Seele: Mein Freund ist mein,
 Jesus: Und ich bin sein,

6. Soul: My beloved is mine,
 Jesus: And I am his¹⁹ [— God the Father's];

Christian worship, which is understood to be a foreshadowing of the Church's meal-sharing communion with Jesus at the End Time. In Luther's rendering of Revelation 3:20, the passage alluded to at this point in the cantata, Jesus says that he will "keep the *Abendmahl* with him who hears his voice" ("das *Abendmahl* mit ihm halten ..."). Luther's rendering of Revelation 3:20 is set verbatim as a recitative in Bach's Cantata 61. 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.

¹⁵The sentiment is taken from Song of Songs 8:6, where the young woman, in the zeal (Luther Bible, "Eifer") of their love, asks her beloved to place her like a seal upon his heart and upon his arm.

¹⁶For this line, Bach composed an astonishing purple-patch of dark harmonies that very quickly and radically brighten; his musical setting may perhaps be understood as a nonverbal allusion to the prominent "wiping away of tears" passage in Revelation 21:4, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "Gott wird abwischen alle Tränen von ihren Augen" ("[when the present world is bygone,] God will wipe away all tears from [his people's] eyes"). While the verb "ergötzen" can mean "to amuse" or "to delight," it is used here in its older sense of "to bring about palpable joy."

¹⁷Since the forms of the German adjectival nouns here are feminine, the implied noun is "hand" (i.e., dative-feminine "auf meiner linken Hand," and nominative-feminine "meine rechte Hand"), not "arm" (which would have called for "auf *meinem* Linken sollst du ruhn, und *mein* Rechter soll dich küssen").

¹⁸The biblically-unbased verb "küssen" (brought in because it rhymes with the poetry's parallel verb "müssen") is here apparently used in its archaic sense of "to cushion." In Song of Songs 8:3 (also 2:6), the Luther Bibles of Bach's day read "seine Linke liegt unter meinem Haupt, und seine Rechte *herzet* mich" ("his left hand lies under my head, and his right hand *embraces* me").

¹⁹Many editions of this cantata emend the reading "*sein*" ("his") here to "*dein*" ("yours"), which on the surface would appear to make much greater sense of the way that the dialogue is set out in the cantata. (Bach's own surviving original materials do clearly read "*sein*.") The words "Mein Freund ist mein, und ich bin sein" are quoted verbatim from Song of Songs 2:16 and 6:3, where the young woman voices to her friends the entirety of both these declarations. Bach's cantata divides the wording of her declarations between its two biblical-poetry-borrowing lovers, the Soul and Jesus, such that now the word "his" is no longer expressed by the voice of the female to refer to the male lover's possession of her, but rather by the voice of the male lover to refer to God's

S & J: Die Liebe soll nichts scheiden.
S, J: {Ich will, du sollst} mit {dir, mir} in Himmels
Rosen weiden,
S & J: Da Freude die Fülle, da Wonne wird sein.

S & J: Nothing shall separate the love [of God from us].²⁰
S, J: {I will, you shall} revel with {you, me} in [the
beloved's garden²¹ of] roses-of-heaven,²²
S & J: Where fullness of joy,²³ where gladness will be.

**7. Gloria sei dir gesungen
Mit Menschen und Englischen Zungen,
Mit Harfen und mit Zimbeln schon.
Von zwölf Perlen sind die Pforten
An deiner Stadt sind wir Konsorten
Der Engel hoch um deinen Thron.
Kein Aug hat je gespürt,
Kein Ohr hat je gehört
Solche Freude.
Des sind wir froh,
Io, io!
Ewig in dulci júbilo.**²⁴

**7. Let “Gloria”²⁵ be sung to you
With the tongues of men and of angels,
Even with harps and with cymbals.
Of twelve pearls are the gates
In your city [where] we are consorts
Of the angels high around your throne.²⁶
No eye has ever perceived,
No ear has ever heard
Such joy.
Of this, we are glad;
“Io, io!”²⁷ [we exclaim]
In sweet jubilation, eternally.**

possession of him (“My [the soul's] beloved is mine, / And I [Jesus] am his [God's].) This becomes fully clear from a proper understanding of the next line of the cantata, a line that in our day is continually misunderstood on account of modern unfamiliarity with its biblical origins.

²⁰The phrase “Die Liebe soll nichts scheiden” derives from Romans 8:35-38, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “Wer will uns scheiden von der Liebe Gottes? ... [Nichts] mag uns scheiden von der Liebe Gottes” (“Who will separate us from the love of God? ... [Nothing] may separate us from the love of God”). Most other Bibles at verse 35 read not “love of God” but “love of Christ.” The word “nothing” is the subject of the cantata’s sentence, and “love” is its object; that is, the sense of the German line in Bach’s duet would be: “Nichts soll die Liebe [Gottes von uns] scheiden” (“Nothing shall separate the love [of God from us]”).

²¹In Song of Songs 6:2, the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day read “Mein Freund ist hinab gegangen in seinen Garten, zu den Würzgärtlein, dass er *sich weide* unter den Garten und Rosen breche” (“My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the little herb-gardens, so that he may revel [or, ‘feast his eyes’] among the gardens, and may pick roses”). By dint of the biblical allusion, the cantata line’s “weiden” should presumably be understood as if it were the reflexive “sich weiden.” Otherwise, this line might seem to talking about feeding upon roses in heaven.

²²The “Himmels-Rose” (in Latin, “Coeli rosa”) is a particular kind of flower. Jesus was sometimes called a “Himmels-Rose,” the idea being that just as the rose is the most beautiful flower, Jesus is the most beautiful human being. Consider, too, the closing lines from verse 3 of the Lutheran chorale “Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern,” which reads as follows in the *Wagneri Gesangbuch*, a massive 17th-century hymn book that Bach owned: “Nach dir, ist mir, *Gratiosa Coeli rosa!* Krank und glimmet, mein Herz durch Liebe verwundet” (“For you [Jesus] — Beloved, Rose-of-Heaven! — is my heart, ill and smoldering, wounded by love”).

²³Psalm 16:11, as rendered in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, “für dir ist Freude die Fülle” (“before you [i.e., in God’s presence] is fullness of joy”).

²⁴The third stanza of “Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme.”

²⁵The word “Gloria” refers to an originally Latin doxology (a short hymn of praise) that was often added as a decisive conclusion for various kinds of poetry in the Christian liturgy. The best known doxology, the “Gloria in excelsis Deo” (“Glory to God in the highest [of the heavens]”), derives from the words of the angels praising God, in Luke 2:14, for the birth of Jesus as God’s Messiah. In the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, the passage

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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reads “Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe” (“May honor be to God on high”). The language of lines 1–6 of Cantata 140’s hymn stanza also calls to mind the apocalyptic hymn of praise in Revelation 7:9-12.

²⁶The hymnals of Bach’s day gave lines 4–6 slightly differently, and they make more sense biblically: “Von zwölf Perlen sind die Pforten an deiner Stadt; wir sind Konsorten der Engel hoch um deinen Thron” (“Of twelve pearls are the gates in your city; we are consorts of the angels high around your throne”). That is, the hymnals have a punctuation mark after “Stadt” and no punctuation mark after “Pforten”; and they have the word order as “wir sind,” not “sind wir.” Lines 4–5a of this stanza stem from Revelation 21:21, and lines 5b–6 from Revelation 7:9-12. The throne depicted in Revelation 7 is located in God’s Temple in heaven (as distinguished from his Temple in Jerusalem), where people of every nation are worshiping God. The city depicted in Revelation 21, however, is on earth, and this city is a “new Jerusalem” (21:2) that comes down out of heaven, from God, to replace, on the “new earth” (21:1), the Jerusalem of the “first earth” (21:1). Cantata 140’s version of its closing hymn stanza introduces a conflation of the “throne” that is in the Temple up in heaven (7:9) with the one that is in the “new Jerusalem” down on earth (22:3), a holy city which is said to have no Temple building (21:22). Strictly speaking, it does not make biblical-narrative sense to say, as Cantata 140 does, that in God’s pearl-gated city (on earth), “we are *consorts* [in the company] of the angels” that are “*high* [in heaven] around your throne.”

²⁷“Io” is a Greek and Latin exclamation of joy or triumph. It is sometimes used in English, just like the Hebrew word *Hallelujah*.