

“Ihr Menschen, rühmet Gottes Liebe” BWV 167

1. Ihr Menschen, rühmet Gottes Liebe
Und preiset seine Gütigkeit!
Lobt ihn aus reinem Herzenstriebe,
Dass er uns zu bestimmter Zeit
Das Horn des Heils, den Weg zum Leben
An Jesu, seinem Sohn, gegeben.

1. You humankind, vaunt God's love
And praise his goodness.
Acclaim him out of pure inclination of the heart,¹
Because² at the appointed time
He gave us the horn of salvation,³ the way to [eternal] life,
In Jesus, his son.

2. Gelobet sei der Herr Gott Israel,⁴
Der sich in Gnaden zu uns wendet
Und seinen Sohn
Vom hohen Himmelsthron
Zum Welterlöser sendet.
Erst stellte sich Johannes ein
Und musste Weg und Bahn
Dem Heiland zubereiten;
Hierauf kam Jesus selber an,
Die armen Menschenkinder
Und die verlornen Sünder
Mit Gnad und Liebe zu erfreun
Und sie zum Himmelreich in wahrer Buss zu leiten.

2. Acclaimed be the Lord God of Israel,
Who turns to us in mercy
And sends his son
From heaven's high throne
As redeemer of the world.
First John [the Baptist] appeared
And had to prepare the way and path
For the savior;
And then⁵ Jesus himself arrived
To gladden the poor children of humankind
And the lost sinners
With mercy and love,
And to lead them to the kingdom of heaven, in true repentance.

3. Gottes Wort, das trüget nicht,
Es geschieht, was er verspricht.
Was er in dem Paradies
Und vor so viel hundert Jahren
Denen Vätern schon verhieß,

3. God's word—this does not deceive;
What he pledges—that happens.
What he promised already in paradise⁶
And so many centuries ago
To the patriarchs [of Israel],⁷

¹“Herzenstriebe” means “Antrieb des Herzen” (“inclination of the heart”).

²In older German, “dass” was sometimes used as a synonym for “weil” (“because”).

³Luke 1:69, “[An Jesu] hat [Gott] uns aufgerichtet ein Horn des Heils in dem Hause seines Dieners David” (“[In Jesus, God] has raised up a horn of salvation in the house/lineage of his servant David [the king of Israel]”). The word “horn,” in biblical Hebrew, signifies power; it is a metaphor taken from animals that fight with their horns.

⁴This movement takes much of its language from the Canticle of Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79 and from the prophetic poem of Isaiah 40:3-5.

⁵“Hierauf” (or “darauf”) was often used in storytelling, to indicate a shift in the narrative, where in English one would say “And then ...”

⁶This “promise” refers to the standard Lutheran, christological interpretation of the Creation narrative in Genesis 3, where the first humans, Adam and Eve, disobey God in “paradise,” the Garden of Eden, 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 Genesis 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; in Lutheran reading, the seed of Eve who tramples Satan's head is Jesus, God's promised Messiah. 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 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.

⁷For example, in the traditional Christian reading of Isaiah 11:1-10.

Haben wir gottlob erfahren.

We—God be acclaimed—have experienced.

4. Des Weibes Samen kam,
Nachdem die Zeit erfüllet;
Der Segen, den Gott Abraham,
Dem Glaubensheld, versprochen,
Ist wie der Glanz der Sonne angebrochen,
Und unser Kummer ist gestillet.
Ein stummer Zacharias preist
Mit lauter Stimme Gott vor seine Wundertat,
Die er dem Volk erzeiget hat.
Bedenkt, ihr Christen, auch, was Gott an euch getan
Und stimmt ihm ein Loblied an!

4. The [foretold] seed [Jesus] of the woman [Eve]⁸ came
When⁹ the time [to inherit the promise of faith] was fulfilled;¹⁰
The blessing that God pledged to Abraham,¹¹
To the hero of faith,¹²
Has broken forth like the radiance of the sun,¹³
And our grief is stilled.¹⁴
A [for a time, forcibly] mute Zechariah¹⁵ [now] praises God
With a loud voice for his miracle [of John's birth]¹⁶
That he has shown to the people [of Israel].¹⁷
Consider, too, you Christians, what God has done for you,
And strike up a song of acclamation to him.

⁸See fn. 6, above.

⁹In older German, “nachdem” was sometimes used as a synonym for “da” (in the sense of “when”); see also fn. 10, below.

¹⁰The language of these lines is derived from Galatians 4:4, “Da aber die Zeit erfüllet ward, sandte Gott seinen Sohn, geboren von einem Weibe” (“But when the time [to inherit the promise of faith] was fulfilled, God sent his son [Jesus], born of a woman [Mary, the new and proper ‘Eve’]”).

¹¹See fn. 12, below.

¹²In traditional Christian interpretation, Abraham is taken to be the father of the Christian faith (and thus its “hero”), especially because he believed God when God made the promise to him that he would be blessed as the progenitor of many (Godly) peoples. The key text was the response narrated in Genesis 15:6, “Abram glaubte dem HERRN, und das rechnete er ihm zur Gerechtigkeit” (“Abram [in Genesis 17 and subsequently called ‘Abraham’] believed the LORD, and he [God] reckoned this to him [Abram] as righteousness”), a passage that Lutheranism understood as a foundational proclamation of the doctrine of justification of salvation through belief/faith, not good works.

¹³The language of this line is derived from Psalm 50:2, “Aus Zion bricht an der schöne Glanz Gottes” (“Out of Zion the beautiful radiance of God breaks forth”), a verse sometimes understood to refer specifically to the gospel of Christ.

¹⁴The “Kummer” spoken of here is the “grief” of sin, inherited from Adam, in Genesis 3:17, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Und zu Adam sprach er: Dieweil du hast gehorcht der Stimme deines Weibes und gessen von dem Baum, ... verflucht sei der Acker um deinetwillen, mit Kummer sollst du dich drauf nähren dein Leben lang” (“And to Adam he [God] said, ‘Because you have obeyed the voice of your wife and ate of the tree [of the knowledge of good and evil], ... cursed be the [arable] land on your account; with grief you shall nourish yourself of that [cursed land] your life long”).

¹⁵Zechariah is the father of “John [the Baptist]” (mentioned in movement 2). In Luke 1:20, the angel Gabriel, having announced to the childless and elderly Zechariah that he will indeed finally give birth to a son, says to him in his skepticism: “Du wirst verstummen, und nicht reden können bis auf den Tag, da dies geschehen wird, darum dass du meinen Worten nicht geglaubt hast” (“Because you have not believed my words, you will fall silent and not be able to speak until the day when this [miraculous birth of your son] will happen”).

¹⁶At the circumcision and naming of John, Zechariah was able to speak again (see fn. 15, above). According to Luke 1:64, “ward sein Mund und seine Zunge aufgetan, und er redete und lobte Gott” (“his mouth and his tongue were opened, and he [now] spoke [again] and acclaimed God”); Zechariah goes on, in Luke 1:68-79, to prophesy, and also to praise God for this birth, with the Cantic of Zechariah.

¹⁷This movement adopts some of its language from Luke 1:68-72, in the Cantic of Zechariah (see fn. 4 and fn. 16, above), “Gelobet sei der HERR, der Gott Israels! denn er hat besucht und erlöst sein Volk ... und Barmherzigkeit erzeigte unsern Vätern” (“Acclaimed be the LORD, the God of Israel; for he has visited and redeemed his people [Israel] ... and shown mercy to our fathers”).

**5. Sei Lob und Preis mit Ehren
Gott Vater, Sohn, Heiligem Geist!
Der woll in uns vermehren,
Was er uns aus Genad verheisst,
Dass wir ihm fest vertrauen,
Gänzlich verlassn auf ihn,
Von Herzen auf ihn bauen,
Dass unsr Herz, Mut und Sinn
Ihm festiglich anhangen;
Darauf singn wir zur Stund:
Amen, wir werdens erlangen,
Gläubn wir aus Herzens Grund.¹⁸**

**5. Acclamation and praise with honor¹⁹ be
To God Father, Son, Holy Spirit,
Who would increase in us
What he, out of mercy, promises us;
That we may trust him steadfastly,
Wholly depend on him,
Rely on him from the heart,
That our heart, courage, and mind
Shall adhere comfortingly to him;
Thus we sing at this hour:
Amen, we will obtain it,
If we believe from the bottom of our heart.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to www.bachcantatatexts.org/BWV167 for an annotated translation

¹⁸The first stanza of this hymn.

¹⁹The “n” in “mit Ehren” here, in older German, is a singular (not plural) dative ending.