

Mass in B minor BWV 232.4

I. MISSA

1. **Kyrie eleison.**

2. **Christe eleison.**

3. **Kyrie eleison.**

4. **Gloria in excelsis Deo,**

5. **et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.**

I. MISSA

1. **Lord, have mercy.**

2. **Christ, have mercy.**

3. **Lord, have mercy.**

4. **Glory to God on high,¹**

5. **and on earth peace to persons of good will.²**

GENERAL NOTES: (i) Many modern printings of the *Mass in B minor* libretto give the standard Latin text that is employed in most musical settings by other composers, evidently unaware that within the text that Bach set, there are three (minor) variants; see fnn. 3, 21, and 34, below. (ii) The numbering system of sections and movements here is taken from the BWV³ (the 3rd edition of the *Bach-Werke Verzeichnis*) of 2022, and (after number 12) an alternate numbering from the BC (*Bach Compendium*) of 1988.

¹“Gloria in excelsis Deo” (“Glory to God *on high* [in heaven]”), as understood in ecclesiastical Latin, can also be rendered “Glory to God *in the highest* [of the heavens].” “In excelsis” is the wording of the Old Latin Bibles in Luke 2:14, which was retained in liturgical uses even after the “Vulgate” (St. Jerome’s translation that became the official Latin Bible of the Roman Church) gave the phrase as “Gloria in altissimis Deo” (“Glory to God *in the highest*”). English translations of the Latin-Mass “Gloria” generally do render the text with the superlative, “Glory to God in the highest.” The Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, however, render the beginning of Luke 2:14 as “Ehre sei Gott *in der Höhe*” (“May honor be to God *on high*”).

²“Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis” is the Vulgate’s rendering of Luke 2:14. The underlying original Greek wording in Luke has been strongly contested. The Greek source text used for translating the Luther Bibles gave the term “eudokia” (“good will,” “pleasure,” or “favor”) in the nominative case, whereas the best ancient manuscripts have it in the genitive, “eudokias.” The Vulgate, going with the genitive, famously rendered the disputed passage with “hominibus bonae voluntatis,” but to Luther, this reading, “[let there be] peace on earth *to persons of good will*” (i.e., rather than “[let there be] peace on earth, [and let there also be God’s] *good will toward persons*”), too readily suggested that God’s mercy and grace could be merited, directly contradicting a central tenet of Lutheran theology. Luther thus rendered Luke’s verse as “Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und Friede auf Erden *und* den Menschen ein *Wohlgefallen*” (“May honor be to God on high, and [may there be] peace on earth, *and* [may there also be (God’s)] *great favor* toward persons”). Luther’s choice to translate the nominative reading—not to mention his insertion of the word “and”—made it possible to understand the gospel passage in a way that he believed more clearly promotes a theology of “unmerited grace.” The vernacular Gloria hymn “Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr” (“To God alone on high be honor”), sung on almost every Sunday in the Lutheran churches of Bach’s day, was apparently designed to cohere with this Lutheran sense at its line 3, “Ein *Wohlgefalln* Gott an uns hat” (“God has *great favor* toward us”). “Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr” is also found in a hymnal printed in 1724 for the Roman Catholic congregation in Leipzig, but line 3 is given here (presumably with the intention of reflecting the apparent sense of the Latin wording of Luke 2:14), as “*Am guten Willen ein Gefalln* Gott hast” (“Toward [persons of] *good will*, God, [you do] have *favor*”). The *Leipziger Kirchen-Andachten* (1694; a Leipzig devotional guide to the Lutheran liturgy), says of the Latin Gloria text, “Welches zu teutsch also lautet: Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe, Friede auf Erden, *und* den Menschen ein *Wohlgefallen* ...” (“Which reads thus in German: May honor be to God on high, peace on earth, and [God’s] *great favor* toward persons ...”). Listening, then, to a choral performance in church of a setting of the Latin Gloria, a devout Lutheran of Bach’s day might well have twigged this line of

6. **Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te.**

6. **We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you.**

7. **Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.**

7. **We give you thanks on account of your great glory.**

8. **Domine Deus, rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens, Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe altissime,³ Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.**

8. **Lord God, heavenly king, God Father almighty, Lord only begotten Son, Jesus Christ most high,⁴ Lord God, Lamb of God,⁵ Son of the Father.**

9. **Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis, qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.**

9. **You who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you who take away the sins of the world, accept our prayer.**

10. **Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis,**

10. **You who sit at the right [hand] of the Father,⁶ have mercy on us,**

11. **quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe,**

11. **for you alone are holy, you alone are Lord, you alone are most high,⁷ Jesus Christ,**

the Latin Mass text according to the import of the well-known German text of their Luther Bibles, not to the apparent sense of the literal translation of the Latin text offered above.

³Bach may have taken this reading, “Jesu Christe *altissime*” (“Jesus Christ *most high*”) from the *Neu Leipziger Gesangbuch* (1682) of Gottfried Vopelius. Bach’s *Missa* settings BWV 233, 234, 235, and 236 at this point read simply “Jesu Christe” (i.e. the standard wording of the Latin Mass). It is sometimes claimed that “altissime” here is a Lutheran or Leipzig textual variant, but its use is also attested in Roman Catholic sources outside of Leipzig in Bach’s day and earlier.

⁴See fn. 3, above and fn. 7, below.

⁵Jesus is called “the Lamb of God” because in his crucifixion he is understood to have been “slaughtered,” like the lambs eaten at the yearly festival of Passover, which celebrates Israel’s deliverance out of slavery in Egypt (as depicted in Exodus 12). According to the Gospel of John, Jesus died on the afternoon before the festival started, right as the Passover lambs were slain. Christianity has traditionally taught that Jesus “takes away the sin of the world” by dying a sacrificial death. Although technically the lamb of the Passover sacrifice was not a “sin offering,” both John 1:29 (“Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world,” a verse that is alluded to here and in number 9 of the “Gloria”) and Revelation 5:9 speak of Jesus as “the Lamb” who is slaughtered as a ransom for sin.

⁶That is, a position of high honor. The quintessential biblical formulation comes from Psalm 110:1, where the poet relates that “the Lord” (God) says to “my lord” (i.e., to the king), “sit at my right hand [in the divine council].” Psalm 110:1 is quoted frequently in the New Testament as having been a prophetic reference to God’s “anointed one,” Jesus.

⁷“Most high” is here used here as an *attribute* of Jesus, which he alone among humans enjoys—he who “was embodied in flesh, from the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary” (see fn. 16, below), he who sits at the right hand of God the Father in heaven (see fn. 6, above). “Most High” is used in the Bible as a *name* of God the Father. In the world of the Bible, names reveal who someone fundamentally “is.” Thus Jesus is called the “Lamb of God,” “the Son of God,” and so on; and God is called “Father,” “Most High,” “The Almighty,” “Lord of Armies/Hosts” (see also fn. 35, below), and so on.

12. **cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris, amen.**

12. **with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father, amen.**

II. SYMBOLUM⁸ NICENUM

II. SYMBOLUM NICENUM

1. | 13. **Credo in unum Deum;**

1. | 13. **I believe in one God;**

2. | 14. **Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem⁹ coeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.**

2. | 14. **I believe in one God, the Father almighty,¹⁰ maker of heaven and earth, of all things, seen and unseen.**

3. | 15. **Et in unum Dominum Jesum Christum, Filium Dei unigenitum, et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula, Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine, Deum verum de Deo vero, genitum non factum, consubstantialem Patri; per quem omnia facta sunt, qui propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem descendit de coelis,**

3. | 15. **And [I believe] in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God,¹¹ born of the Father before all the ages,¹² God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made,¹³ of one substance with the Father;¹⁴ through whom all things were made, [the Son] who on account of us human beings and on account of our salvation, came down from the heavens,**

⁸The word “Symbolum” has various meanings. Here it corresponds to the German word “Glaubensbekenntnis” and to the English word “Creed,” a formal authoritative statement of the religious belief of the Christian church. This text here of numbers 13–21 is traditionally called the “Nicene Creed,” but more accurately the “Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed,” since it includes additions and revisions of the First Council of Constantinople in the year 381. Martin Luther’s *Die drei Symbola oder Bekenntnis des Glaubens Christi* (“The Three Symbols or Confession of the Faith of Christ”) of 1538, discusses the Apostles’ Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed; this tract was widely reprinted, and Bach himself owned several copies.

⁹A libretto for an apparently six-movement concerted (i.e., cantata-like) setting of the Nicene Creed in Latin was printed, with several minor textual variants, in the cantata-text booklets distributed to the congregations of the Thomaskirche and Nikolaikirche in Leipzig for Trinity Sunday in 1721. At this point, the booklet text reads “Creatorum coeli & terrae” (“Creator of heaven and earth”), which is the wording in the first sentence from the standard Latin text of the Apostles’ Creed.

¹⁰In his German rendering of the Nicene Creed, Luther gives “Ich glaube an einen einigen Allmächtigen Gott den Vater” (“I believe in a [one and] only Almighty God the Father”).

¹¹Luther, “Gottes einigen Sohn” (“God’s only Son”).

¹²Luther, “vor der ganzen Welt” (“before the entire [existence of the] world”).

¹³In being “begotten, not made,” the Son is understood here as generated eternally from the Father.

¹⁴Or, “of one being with the Father”; Luther, “mit dem Vater in einerlei Wesen” (“in one-and-the-same essence with [God] the Father”). That is, the Son and God the Father are held not as two gods, but as having one and the same divine nature.

4. | 16. **et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine et homo factus est.**¹⁵

4. | 16. **and was embodied in flesh,¹⁶ from the Holy Spirit, of the Virgin Mary, and was made a human being.**¹⁷

5. | 17. **Crucifixus etiam¹⁸ pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato, passus et sepultus est,**¹⁹

5. | 17. **He was also crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;²⁰ he suffered [on the cross] and was buried,**

¹⁵Bach had at first employed all of the verbal text from these numbers 15 and 16 within the music of number 15. In his revised version of the Credo, he excised the text originally used in mm. 64–76 of number 15 and composed an entirely new musical setting for it, namely number 16; then, within the music of number 15 he redistributed the text underlay of his original mm. 9–62 such that this language was underlaid now throughout mm. 9–76.

¹⁶“Incarnatus est” is often rendered in English as “was incarnate,” which means “was enfleshed”; Luther here gives “leibhaftig” (“having a [human] body”).

¹⁷That is, God’s “not-made/not-created” eternal divine Son was, however, “made” (in the human bodily nature of Jesus) a human being in a particular time with a particular history. The Nicene Creed forcefully reflects and promotes the belief that there was never a time when God the divine Son did not exist, and thus that God’s divine Son was not “made” (or, “created”).

¹⁸In the Leipzig 1721 text booklet, not “crucifixus etiam pro nobis” (“he was also crucified for us”), but “crucifixusque pro nobis” (“and he was crucified for us”), a trivial variant also found in some earlier transmissions of the Nicene Creed.

¹⁹In the Leipzig 1721 text booklet, not “passus et sepultus est” (“he suffered [on the cross] and was buried”), but “passus, mortuus et sepultus est” (“he suffered [on the cross], died, and was buried”); this was presumably taken from the formulation “passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus et sepultus” (“he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried”) in the Apostles’ Creed.

²⁰Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea (“Pontius” is Pilate’s forename) during whose tenure Jesus was crucified.

6. | 18. **et resurrexit tertia die secundum scripturas; et ascendit in coelum, sedet ad dexteram Dei²¹ Patris;²² et iterum venturus est cum gloria iudicare vivos et mortuos, cuius²³ regni non erit finis.**

7. | 19. **Et in Spiritum Sanctum, Dominum et vivificantem, qui ex Patre Filioque procedit,²⁶ qui cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et glorificatur,²⁷ qui locutus est per Prophetas; et unam sanctam catholicam et Apostolicam Ecclesiam.**

6. | 18. **and rose again on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,²⁴ and ascended into heaven, sitting at the right [hand] of God²⁵ the Father; and he will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, of whose reign there will be no end.**

7. | 19. **And [I believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from²⁸ the Father and the Son; who is worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son,²⁹ [the Spirit]**

²¹Vopelius and the *Leipziger Kirchen-Andachten*, like most textual sources of the Nicene Creed, read not “ad dexteram Dei Patris” (“at the right [hand] of God the Father”) but simply “ad dexteram Patris” (“at the right [hand] of the Father”).

²²In the Leipzig 1721 text booklet, not “sedet ad dexteram Dei Patris” (“sitting at the right [hand] of God the Father”), but “et sedet a dextris Patris” (“and sits at the right [hand] of the Father”).

²³In Vopelius, “ejus” (“his”); in the *Leipziger Kirchen-Andachten* and the Leipzig 1721 text booklet, “cuius” (“whose”).

²⁴The specific language of this phrase (“was buried and rose again on the third day in accordance with the scriptures”) comes from 1 Corinthians 15:4, but that New Testament passage does not indicate which scripture of ancient Israel had predicted this. In Acts 2:27-31, however, the apostle Peter is depicted quoting a passage from Psalm 16 as scripture that, he proclaimed, had prophesied Jesus’s coming back to life (but without specifying that this would be “on the third day”).

²⁵See fn. 21 above.

²⁶In the Leipzig 1721 text booklet, “qui ex Patre et Filioque procedit” (“who proceeds from the Father and also the Son”).

²⁷In Vopelius, the *Leipziger Kirchen-Andachten*, and the Leipzig 1721 text booklet, “conglorificatur” (“glorified with”).

²⁸Luther, “ausgeht,” which can mean “emanates” or “is sent,” or both; Lutheranism emphasized the former sense.

²⁹That is, the Holy Spirit, like the God the Father and the Son, is fully divine, and therefore likewise is to be worshiped—the Holy Spirit, the Son, and God the Father are worshiped, however, not as three gods but as one and the same god. The Holy Spirit is understood here to eternally “proceed from” both the Father and the Son. The Nicene Creed originally (in the fourth century) made this explicit declaration only of the Father, and the Eastern (“Orthodox”) Church separated from the Western (“Catholic”) Church, in the eleventh century (and these two major Christian denominations remain separated to this day), largely over the “Filioque Clause controversy,” a disagreement over whether the Latin churches who added the “Filioque” to the text of the creed in the sixth to eleventh centuries were theologically and otherwise correct to do so, and also over whether, even if correct, they had the right to do so unilaterally.

who spoke through the Prophets; and [I believe in] one holy, world-wide,³⁰ and Apostolic³¹ Church.³²

8. | 20. **Confiteor unum baptismam in remissionem peccatorum, [9a.] et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum;**

8. | 20. **I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins, [9a.] and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead;**

9[b]. | 21. **et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum et vitam venturi saeculi, amen.**

9[b]. | 21. **and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age³³ to come, amen.**

³⁰The creed's "ecclesia catholica" means "world-wide church," an expression designed to refer to all Christians collectively. Fearing that the use of the cognate adjective in translating the creed—in German, "catholische" (in English, "catholic"), which at least technically would, like the Latin "catholicam," mean "world-wide"—might appear to privilege the Roman Catholic Church, Luther (like some others before him) rendered this phrase as "eine einige Heilige, *Christliche*, Apostolische Kirche" ("a [one and] only Holy, *Christian*, Apostolic Church"). Luther's translation was included in the *Leipziger Kirchen-Andachten*. At this point in his translation of the creed in *Die drei Symbola* (see fn. 8, above), Luther also printed a marginal gloss: "(Christlich) Catholica kann man nicht wohl besser deutschen denn Christlich ... Das ist: wo Christen sind in aller Welt; dawider tobet der Pabst und will seinen Hof allein die Christliche Kirche geheissen haben; [er] leugt aber, wie der Teufel sein Abgott" ("[Concerning the use here of] 'Christian [Church]': one probably cannot translate 'Catholic' better than as 'Christian' ... i.e., [a 'Christian Church' in the sense of 'the Church] where Christians are, in all the world'; the Pope rants against this, and wants to have his club alone [namely, 'the Roman Catholic Church'; note that "Hof" is used here in its older German sense as a synonym for "Gesellschaft" in its senses of "club" or "fellowship"] be called 'the Christian Church'; but [he, the Pope, ever] gainsays, like his idol the Devil").

³¹The church is considered "Apostolic" if it is believed to be properly continuous with "The Twelve [Disciples/Apostles]" that Jesus sent out to preach his gospel message to the world, and also with the later apostles Paul (who was known as the "Apostle of the Gentiles") and Barnabas, said to be sent by the Holy Spirit.

³²In his translation of the Bible, Luther rendered the Greek word "ecclesia" ("assembly") not with "Kirche" ("church"), which he thought sounded too Roman Catholic, but "Gemeine" ("community/assembly"; later Luther Bibles employed the spelling "Gemeinde"). The words "Kirche" and "church," which in German and English are the most common renderings of "ecclesia," are etymologically derived not from "ecclesia" but from the Greek "kuriakos" ("belonging to the Lord").

³³Luther, "Welt" ("world").

III. SANCTUS

- | 22. **Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth, pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria ejus.**³⁴

IV. OSANNA, BENEDICTUS, AGNUS DEI, ET DONA NOBIS PACEM

1. | 23. **Osanna in excelsis.**

2. | 24. **Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.**

3. | 25. **Osanna in excelsis.**

4. | 26. **Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.**

5. | 27. **Dona nobis pacem.**

III. SANCTUS

- | 22. **Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Hosts,**³⁵ **heaven and earth are full of his glory.**

IV. OSANNA, BENEDICTUS, AGNUS DEI, ET DONA NOBIS PACEM

1. | 23. **Hosanna on high.**³⁶

2. | 24. **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**³⁷

3. | 25. **Hosanna on high.**

4. | 26. **Lamb of God,**³⁸ **you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you who take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.**

5. | 27. **[Lamb of God,**³⁹**] Grant us peace.**

³⁴The standard reading in the Mass here is “tua” (“your”). Bach gives “ejus” (“his”) throughout, except in m. 60 in the tenor line and in mm. 92–93 in the soprano 1 line, where he does give “tua” (“your”); in m. 60 of Bach’s original score, the text was later changed by his son C.P.E. Bach (who inherited the manuscript) from “tua” to “ejus.” J. S. Bach’s *Sanctus* settings BWV 232.1, 237 and 238 also read “ejus,” not “tua.” Vopelius and the *Leipziger Kirchen-Andachten* also give “tua.” In any event, both “your” and “his” refer to the “Lord God of Hosts/Armies (about whom, see fn. 35, below).” The use of “his” stems from the language of the corresponding song of praise in Isaiah 6:3 (which, in the Vulgate, concludes with “gloria ejus”).

³⁵“Sabaoth” (“of armies”) is an ancient label for God as divine warrior who leads the earthly armies of Israel and heavenly armies of angels. “Dominus Deus Sabaoth” is traditionally rendered in English as “Lord God of Hosts,” where “hosts” is employed in its sense of “army multitudes.”

³⁶That is, “Hosanna [be shouted] on high [in heaven]”; or, “Hosanna [be shouted] in the highest [of the heavens]” (see also fn. 1, above). “Hosanna” is a transliteration of the Hebrew “hoshiah-na” (“help/save [us], please”) that appears in Psalm 118:25. The expression was understood in the New Testament to be not a prayer for help or salvation (apparently the exclusive way it had been known in pre-Christian Judaism, and also the way it is known in modern Judaism) but a cry of acclamation and praise, hence the phrase “Hosanna [be shouted] in the highest [of the heavens]” in Mark 11:10 and Matthew 21:9 (also 21:15).

³⁷A verbatim quotation of Mark 11:9, Matthew 21:9, Luke 19:38, and John 12:13, which in turn is quoting Psalm 118:26, the standard Hebrew text of which, however, apparently reads with a different emphasis: “Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes” (or, “May he who enters [the Temple] be blessed in the name of the Lord”). Luther rendered all five passages from the psalm and the gospels not with “Gesegnet sei” (“Blessed be”), but “Gelobet sei” (“Praised be”).

³⁸See fn. 5, above.

³⁹The standard Agnus Dei text is an *A-A-A'* structure, “[A:] Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis; [A:] Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis; [A':] Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.” Bach’s musical

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setting in the *Mass in B minor* gives the first two *A* sections in the penultimate number and only the latter part of section *A*' (i.e., only the phrase “dona nobis pacem”) in the final number. This shorter version is a liturgical option for Sundays and festival days, according, e.g., to the Lutheran hymnologist and liturgical scholar Johann Olearius in his *Hymnologia Passionalis* of 1709.