

Christmas Oratorio BWV 248.2

1. Teil

1. Jauchzet, frohlocket, auf, preiset die Tage,
Rühmet, was heute der Höchste getan!
Lasset das Zagen, verbannet die Klage,
Stimmet voll Jauchzen und Fröhlichkeit an!
Dienet dem Höchsten mit herrlichen Chören,
Lasst uns den Namen des Herrschers¹ verehren!

2. *Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, dass ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augusto ausging, dass alle Welt geschätzt würde.⁵ Und jedermann ging, dass er sich schätzen liesse, ein jeglicher in seine Stadt. Da machte sich auch auf Joseph aus Galiläa, aus der Stadt Nazareth, in das jüdische Land zur Stadt David, die da heisset Bethlehem; darum, dass er von dem Hause und Geschlechte David war, auf dass er sich schätzen liesse mit Maria, seinem vertrauten Weibe, die war schwanger. Und als sie daselbst waren, kam die Zeit, dass sie gebären sollte.⁶*

3. Nun wird mein liebster Bräutigam,
Nun wird der Held aus Davids Stamm
Zum Trost, zum Heil der Erden
Einmal geboren werden.

Part 1

1. Shout, exult, arise, praise the days [of Christmas],
Glorify what the Most High [God]² has done this day.
Leave off being fainthearted, banish lamentation;
Break forth into song, full of shouting and gladness.
Serve the Most High with glorious choirs;³
Let us revere the name of the ruler [of the universe].⁴

2. *But it happened at that time that a commandment went out from the emperor Augustus that all the [Roman] world would be tallied [in a census].⁷ And everyone [from Judea] went, that he might have himself tallied, each one to his [ancestral] city. Then Joseph too made out to go up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, into the Jewish region⁸ to the city of [King] David, which is called Bethlehem,⁹ this, because he was from the house and lineage of David, so that he might have himself tallied with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was pregnant. And while they were in that place, the time came that she should give birth.*

3. Now will my most beloved bridegroom,¹⁰
Now will the champion from the lineage of David—
For the consolation, for the salvation of the earth—
At last be born.

¹In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads "des Höchsten" ("the Most High's"), which is presumably a printing error, as this expression is used also in the previous line in Bach's materials.

²"Most High" is a name used frequently in the Hebrew Bible for the Lord God of Israel. In the New Testament, God the father (but not Jesus, the son) is called "Most High."

³Movement 22 speaks of the singing of (a choir of) angels, and movement 14 speaks in addition of a choir of shepherds who in movement 17 are summoned to sing the lullaby text of movement 18. The songs of "Zion," here referring to the church, in praising God can be feeble and inarticulate, according to movement 24.

⁴That is, not the earthly ruler but the name of the supreme ruler, God, "the Most High"; see also line 1 of movement 24.

⁵The libretto skips over Luke 2:2, "Und diese Schatzung war die allererste, und geschah zur Zeit, da Cyrenius Landpfleger in Syrien war" ("And this census was the very first: and [it] took place at the time that Quirinius was governor in Syria"). Note that this is Luther's rendering—Luke 2:2 has been variously translated and is historically and theologically controversial.

⁶Luke 2:1 and 3-6.

⁷For Jews, because they were exempt from military service, such a census-taking would have been essentially for taxation.

⁸In a few particular contexts Luther does translate the Bible's "Ioudaia" (the word here in Luke's Greek) as "Judäa" ("Judea"), but for the most part he renders it "das jüdische Land" ("the Jewish land/region").

⁹Bethlehem was the family home of King David of Israel (1 Samuel 17:12) and the place of his anointing as king (1 Samuel 16:4-13).

¹⁰That is, Jesus is the "bridegroom," and his "bride" is the church ("Zion," in line 7).

Nun wird der Stern aus Jakob scheinen,
Sein Strahl bricht schon hervor.
Auf, Zion, und verlasse nun das Weinen,
Dein Wohl steigt hoch empor!

Now will the star out of Jacob¹¹ shine;
Its stream [of light and glory]¹² is already breaking forth.
Arise, Zion, and forsake weeping now;
Your well-being climbs on high!

4. Bereite dich, Zion, mit zärtlichen Trieben,
Den Schönsten, den Liebsten bald bei dir zu sehn!
Deine Wangen
Müssen heut viel schöner prangen,
Eile, den Bräutigam sehnlichst zu lieben!

4. Make yourself ready, [God's people,] Zion, with delicate impulses,¹³
To see the most lovely, the most beloved one, [Jesus,] soon with you.
This day your cheeks
Must sparkle much more beautifully;
Hurry on, to love the bridegroom most longingly!¹⁴

5. **Wie soll ich dich empfangen
Und wie begegn' ich dir,
O aller Welt Verlangen,
O meiner Seelen Zier?
O Jesu, Jesu, setze
Mir selbst die Fackel bei,
Damit, was dich ergötze,
Mir kund und wissend sei.**¹⁵

5. **How shall I receive you,
And how shall I meet you,¹⁶
Oh [heart's] desire of all the world,
Oh [wisdom,¹⁷ Jesus, that is the] ornament of my soul?
Oh Jesus, Jesus, indeed¹⁸ set
The torch [of your saving word]¹⁹ by me,
So that whatever brings you enjoyment
May be manifest and known to me.**

¹¹This is the “star out of Jacob” of Numbers 24:17, “Es wird ein Stern aus Jakob aufgehen und ein Zepter aus Israel aufkommen” (“There will shoot up a star out of [the lineage of] Jacob and [there will] be brought up a scepter out of Israel”), a passage traditionally taken in Christianity to be a prophecy of God’s messiah, Jesus.

¹²In Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26, the personification of wisdom is described as a “Strahl der Herrlichkeit des Allmächtigen” (“stream of the Almighty’s glory”) and “Glanz des ewigen Lichts” (“radiance of the eternal light”).

¹³With regard to the poet’s related use of “Mit sanftmutsvollem Trieb / Und grösster Zärtlichkeit” (“With tenderful impulse / And greatest delicacy”) in movement 61, see fn. 184 and fn. 185, below.

¹⁴Much of this (highly erotic) imagery comes from the Song of Songs; Revelation 19:7 speaks of the “marriage” of Jesus (“the Lamb”) and the church (“the wife,” who “makes herself ready”).

¹⁵The first stanza of this hymn.

¹⁶Lines 1–2 allude to a reference to being met by the personification of wisdom in Sirach 15:7-8, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Wer Gottes Wort hält, der findet sie; und sie wird ihm begegnen, wie eine Mutter, und wird ihm empfahen, wie eine junge Braut” (“Whoever keeps the word of God, he finds her [the personification of wisdom, and thus he becomes wise]; and she [wisdom] will meet him [the man who fears the LORD] like [she is] a mother, and will receive him like [she is] a young bride”). In Luther’s (and others’) teaching, God’s messiah Jesus is associated both with the personification of wisdom and with God’s word; Luther’s rendering of Sirach is tendentious, however, as the source text he translates here was linking wisdom not with God’s “word” (for Luther, especially the gospel of Christ) but with God’s “law” (the law of Moses).

¹⁷See the allusions to wisdom in fn. 12 and fn. 16, above.

¹⁸The word “selbst” here is not reflexive (“myself,” “yourself,” or “itself”) but rather an intensifier in the sense of “sogar” (“indeed”).

¹⁹The sense of this line is derived from Psalm 119:105, “Dein Wort ist meines Fusses Leuchte, und ein Licht auf meinem Wege” (“[LORD,] your word is my foot’s lamp, and a light on my path [to salvation]”) and Isaiah 62:1, “Um Zions willen, so will ich nicht schweigen, ... bis dass ihre Gerechtigkeit aufgehe wie ein Glanz und ihr Heil entbrenne wie eine Fackel” (“Thus for the sake of Zion I will not be silent, ... until its righteousness may rise like a [dawn’s] radiance and its salvation may be enflamed like a torch”).

6. *Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn und wickelte ihn in Windeln und legte ihn in eine Krippen, denn sie hatten sonst keinen Raum in der Herberge.*²⁰

6. *And she [Mary] gave birth to her firstborn son²¹ and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him into a manger, for they otherwise²² had no room [available] in the inn.*

7. Er ist auf Erden kommen arm,
Wer will²³ die Liebe recht erhöh,
Die unser Heiland vor uns hegt?
Dass er unser sich erbarm,
Ja, wer vermag es einzusehen,
Wie ihn der Menschen Leid bewegt?
Und²⁴ in dem²⁵ Himmel mache reich,
Des Höchsten Sohn kömmt in die Welt,
Weil ihm ihr Heil so wohl gefällt,
Und seinen lieben Engeln gleich.
So will er selbst als Mensch geboren werden.
Kyrieleis.²⁶

7. He [God's messiah] has come on earth poor,
Who will properly extol the love
That our savior harbors for us?
That he might have mercy on us,
Yes, who is capable of perceiving it,
How human suffering moves him?
And might make [us spiritually] rich,²⁷ in heaven,
The son of the Most High comes into the world
Because its salvation pleases him so well
And [might make us] equal to his beloved angels.²⁸
That he will even²⁹ be born as a human being.
Lord, have mercy.

²⁰Luke 2:7.

²¹“Erster Sohn” is Luther’s rendition throughout the Bible for the “firstborn,” which is a technical term: according to Exodus 13:1-2, God has a claim to the “firstborn” of animals and of humans (whether or not others are or might be born later). In Luke 2:22-39, Jesus is brought to the Temple in Jerusalem for purification and to be presented to the Lord as “the firstborn.” (A law or practice of bringing the firstborn specifically to the Temple for presentation, or for purification, is unknown in Jewish tradition, however, from either the written or oral law.)

²²Only a very few Bible translations give this verse such that it also includes the sense captured by Luther’s use of “sonst” (“else,” “otherwise”).

²³Some modern printings of the libretto give not “will” (“will”) but “kann” (“can”).

²⁴Some modern printings of the libretto give not “Und” (“And”) but “Uns” (“Us”).

²⁵In not only the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants but also the original performing part and Bach’s own score, this is given the awkward reading “Und in den Himmel mache reich” (“And might make [us spiritually] rich, in the skies/heavens” [dative plural]; or, “And might make [us spiritually] rich, into heaven [accusative singular]). The hymnbooks, more logically, give “dem Himmel” (“in heaven” [dative singular]). It has been reported in the scholarly literature that Bach’s own score reads with an abbreviation for the definite article such that the text could be plausibly read as “in dem” or “in den,” but this is not the case: Bach very clearly wrote “in den,” where its final “n” intersects with the slur over notes 5–6 in the basso continuo line.

²⁶A stanza of “Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ.” The last line, “Kyrieleis” (“Lord, have mercy”), is lacking in the printed libretto booklet that was made available to Bach’s fellow congregants; this was clearly a printing error, and “Kyrieleis” is indeed included at the end of movement 28.

²⁷The idea that Jesus makes his followers spiritually rich (with salvation), through his giving up the riches of his eternal glory for his earthly mission, comes from 2 Corinthians 8:9.

²⁸This idea comes from Luke 20:36, “sie sind den Engeln gleich” (“they [those who will be made worthy of obtaining the age to come] are equal to the angels”).

²⁹The word “selbst” here is not reflexive (“himself”) but rather an intensifier in the sense of “sogar” (“even”).

8. Grosser Herr, o³⁰ starker König,
Liebster Heiland, o wie wenig
Achtest du der Erden Pracht!
Der die ganze Welt erhält,³¹
Ihre Pracht und Zier erschaffen,
Muss in harten Krippen schlafen.

8. Great Lord [Jesus], oh [spiritually] strong³² king,
Most beloved savior, oh how trivial
Do you consider earthly splendor!
He who upholds the whole world,
[He through whom] its splendor and ornament [is] created,³³
Must sleep in [a] harsh manger.

9. Ach mein herzliebes Jesulein,
Mach dir ein rein sanft Bettlein,
Zu ruhn in meines Herzens Schrein,
Dass ich nimmer vergesse dein!³⁴

9. Ah my dearly beloved little Jesus,
Make yourself a spotless,³⁵ soft little bed
[For you] to rest [in], in the shrine of my heart,
So that I may never forget you.

2. Teil

Part 2

10. Sinfonia

10. Sinfonia

11. *Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend auf dem Felde bei den Hürden, die hüteten des Nachts ihre Herde. Und siehe, des Herren Engel trat zu ihnen, und die Klarheit des Herren leuchtet um sie, und sie fürchten sich sehr.*³⁶

11. *And there were shepherds in the same area, in the field next to the live-stock pens, who were tending their flock by night. And look, the angel of the Lord approached them, and the radiance of the Lord lit up around them, and they were very afraid.*

12. **Brich an, o³⁷ schönes Morgenlicht,
Und lass den Himmel tagen!
Du Hirtenvolk, erschrecke nicht,
Weil dir die Engel sagen,
Dass dieses schwache Knäbelein**

12. **Break forth, [Lord,]³⁹ oh lovely morning light,
And let heaven [rise like the] dawn.
You shepherd folk, do not be alarmed;
For the angels tell you**

³⁰Some modern printings of the libretto give not “o” (“oh”) but “und” (“and”).

³¹Not “erhält” (“upholds”) but “gemacht” (“made”) in the printed libretto booklet that was made available to Bach’s fellow congregants—the printed text thus affords a rhyme with “Pracht” (“splendor”).

³²Luke 2:40, in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, says of Jesus, “Aber das Kind wuchs und ward stark im Geist” (“But the child grew and became strong in the spirit [of God]”).

³³It may sound strange for this poetry to suggest that Jesus was involved in creating the world and its worldly splendor and ornament. The idea comes from Colossians 1:16, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, with slight orthographical variations among them, reads “Denn durch ihn ist alles erschaffen, das im Himmel und auf Erden ist, ... die Thronen und Herrschaften, und Fürstentümen, und Oberkeiten” (“For through him [the LORD Jesus Christ] everything is created that is in heaven and on earth, ... the thrones and dominions, and principalities, and [the ruling] authorities”).

³⁴A stanza of “Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her.”

³⁵In German, “rein” can denote or connote the morally or physically “pure” or “clean.” For example, the phrase “I value honest [i.e., morally clean/pure] business” may be expressed as “Ich halte auf ehrliches Geschäft”; a figurative expression employed for the same sentiment, however, was “Ich halte auf reine wäsche” (“I value clean laundry,” i.e., the opposite of “I do not like airing dirty laundry”). The idea in this hymn stanza is that Jesus’s bed is not only physically but also morally spotless.

³⁶Luke 2:8-9.

³⁷The hymnbooks and the printed libretto booklet that was made available to Bach’s fellow congregants read not “o” (“oh”) but “du” (“you”); Bach may have given “o” simply by mistake in working from memory. See also fn. 91 and fn. 92, below.

³⁹The sense of this line is derived from Hosea 6:3, “er wird hervor brechen wie die schöne Morgenröte” (“he [the LORD] will break forth like the lovely red [light] of the morning”).

**Soll unser Trost und Freude sein,
Dazu den Satan zwingen
Und letztlich Friede bringen!**³⁸

**That this helpless⁴⁰ little boy
Shall be our comfort and joy,
[Shall] vanquish Satan, too,
And finally bring peace!**

13. *Und der Engel sprach zu ihnen: Fürchtet euch nicht! Siehe, ich verkündige euch grosse Freude, die allem Volke widerfahren wird; denn euch ist heute der Heiland geboren, welcher ist Christus, der Herr, in der Stadt David.*⁴¹

13. *And the angel declared to them: "Fear not! Look, I announce to you great joy that will befall all the people [in the world],⁴² for to you this day is born in the city of David the savior, who is Christ, the Lord."*

14. Was Gott dem Abraham verheissen,
Das lässt er nun dem Hirtenchor
Erfüllt erweisen.
Ein Hirt hat alles das zuvor
Von Gott erfahren müssen;
Und nun muss auch ein Hirt die Tat,
Was er damals versprochen hat,
Zuerst erfüllet wissen.

14. [A worldwide blessing] that God pledged to Abraham,⁴³
He now lets be revealed to the choir⁴⁴ of shepherds
As fulfilled.
A [lowly] shepherd [Abraham]
Had to learn all this from God in the first instance;
And now, too, a shepherd must [be the] first
To come to know as fulfilled
The deed that he [God] promised back then.

15. Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet,
Eh ihr euch zu lang verweilet,
Eilt, das holde Kind zu sehn!
Geht, die Freude heisst zu schön,
Sucht die Anmut zu gewinnen,
Geht und labet Herz und Sinnen!

15. Joyful shepherds, hurry, ah hurry,
Ere you tarry too long;
Hurry on, to see the gracious child!
Go, the joy is all too lovely;
Seek to gain the refinement [of this child];
Go and refresh [your] hearts and minds!

³⁸A stanza of "Ermuntre dich, mein schwacher Geist."

⁴⁰The baby Jesus appears "schwach" not in its sense of "kränklich" ("sickly") or "gebrechlich" ("weak," "frail") but of "ohnmächtig" ("powerless," "helpless").

⁴¹Luke 2:10-11.

⁴²Luther's "allem Volke" is ambiguous: it might most readily be taken to mean "[befall] all the people [in the world]," but it might possibly be read as "[befall] all the people [of historical Israel]" (which is what the Greek source text in Luke most likely means). The former is apparently what Luther intended: his commentary on the passage says "die allen Leuten widerfahren wird" ("which will befall all peoples"). Although some biblical commentators have, like Luther, understood Luke here to be including gentiles (noting that in Acts 15:14 and 18:10 the gentiles are reckoned in the "people of God"), in Luke 2 the birth of the Davidic savior is probably said to be for "the whole people [of (historical, "Jewish") Israel]"; see, too, Luke 3:21; 7:29; 8:47. In place of Luther's "die allem Volk widerfahren wird," some modern German Bibles read either "die für das ganze Volk sein wird" ("that will be for the whole people [of Israel]") or "für alle Menschen" ("for all [the] persons [in the world]").

⁴³In Luther's rendering of Genesis 12:3 God says to Abram (whose name is changed to "Abraham" in Genesis 17), "in dir sollen gesegnet werden alle Geschlechter auf Erden" ("in you [i.e., in your progeny] shall all generations on earth be blessed"). Traditional Christian interpretation has understood this verse to refer to the world—namely, the Jews who accept Jesus as God's messiah (these are called physical descendants of Abraham), and the gentile followers of Jesus (these are called the spiritual descendants of Abraham)—being blessed with the advent of Jesus.

⁴⁴"Chor" can mean either a collection of singers ("choir") or a "group" more generally. The infancy narratives in the gospels do not depict the shepherds as singing, but in the last lines of movement 18 the libretto poetry encourages a "full choir" of shepherds to sing to Jesus.

16. *Und das habt zum Zeichen: Ihr werdet finden das Kind in Windeln gewickelt und in einer Krippe liegen.*⁴⁵

**17. Schaut hin, dort liegt im finstern Stall,
Des Herrschaft gehet überall!
Da Speise vormals sucht ein Rind,
Da ruhet itzt der Jungfraun Kind.**⁴⁶

18. So geht denn hin, ihr Hirten, geht,
Dass ihr das Wunder seht!
Und findet ihr des Höchsten Sohn
In einer harten Krippe liegen,
So singet ihm bei seiner Wiegen
Aus einem süßen Ton
Und mit gesamtem Chor
Dies⁴⁸ Lied zur Ruhe vor:

19. Schlafe, mein Liebster, genieße der Ruh,
Wache nach diesem vor aller Gedeihen!
Labe die Brust,
Empfinde die Lust,
Wo wir unser Herz erfreuen!

16. *And take this for a sign: you will find the child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.*

**17. Behold, there lies in the dark stable
[God's messiah], whose dominion extends over all [the world].⁴⁷
Where formerly an ox sought food,
There [Mary] the Virgin's child now rests.**

18. So go forth, then, you shepherds; go,
That you may see the marvel [of Christ's advent].
And when you find the son of [God] the Most High
Lying in a harsh manger,
Then sing for him by his cradle,
In a sweet tone
And with [your] whole choir,
This lullaby:

19. Sleep, my most beloved, enjoy your rest,
Awake after this for the flourishing of all [in faith].⁴⁹
Refresh our⁵⁰ breast,
Feel our⁵¹ delight
[There] where we gladden our hearts.

⁴⁵Luke 2:12.

⁴⁶A stanza of "Schaut, schaut, was ist für Wunder dar?"

⁴⁷The word "Herrschaft" is used here apparently in its sense of "der Bezirk, über den eine solche Gewalt reicht, das beherrschte Land" ("the area over which such a power reaches, the ruled land"), i.e., the area ruled by a lord, his "dominion." The sense of the hymn's lines 1–2 is derived from Zechariah 9:10, "seine Herrschaft wird sein von einem Meer bis ans andere, ... bis an der Welt Ende" ("his [your messianic king's] dominion will be from one sea to the other, ... to the [topographical] end of the world").

⁴⁸In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this read not "Dies" ("this") but "Das" ("the").

⁴⁹In the New Testament, God is proclaimed to be the source of human growth through faith in God's messiah, Jesus; and in this poetry, the (human-divine) baby Jesus is bidden to effect the flourishing of all. The poetry's language of "flourishing" comes from Luther's idiosyncratic rendering of 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, "Ich habe gepflanzt, Apollos hat begossen; aber Gott hat das Gedeihen gegeben" ("I [the apostle Paul] have planted [among you the seed of belief in God's messiah, Jesus], Apollo [my colleague] has watered [this plant]; but God has given/caused the blossoming/flourishing").

⁵⁰It is the breast not of Jesus but of "us" that is refreshed here. See also movement 38, "Mein Jesus heisset meine Lust, / Mein Jesus labet Herz und Brust" ("My Jesus is called my delight"; / "My Jesus refreshes [my] heart and breast").

⁵¹With regard to whose delight is proclaimed here, see fn. 50, above.

20. Und alsobald⁵² war da bei dem Engel die Menge der himmlischen Heerscharen, die lobten Gott und sprachen.⁵³

20. And immediately there was with the angel the mass of the heavenly army formations⁵⁴ [of angels] who lauded God, declaring:

21. Ehre sei Gott in der Höhe und Friede auf Erden und den Menschen ein Wohlgefallen.⁵⁵

21. "May honor be to God on high, and peace on earth, and to humankind [God's] great pleasure."⁵⁶

22. So recht, ihr Engel, jauchzt und singet,
Dass es uns heut so schön gelinget!
Auf denn! Wir stimmen mit euch ein;
Uns kann es so wie euch erfreun.

22. Quite right, you angels; shout and sing
That [with] this day [of Christ's advent] we have come so
beautifully to prosper.⁵⁷
Arise, then! We join in with you [in shouting and singing];
It [Christ's advent] can gladden us and you.

⁵²"Alsobald" is an intensified form of "alsbald" ("immediately"). The printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants here gives "alsbald."

⁵³Luke 2:13.

⁵⁴Because this passage, Luke 2:13, is extremely well-known in English from the rendering of the King James Bible used in Handel's *Messiah*, "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host," many translations of the *Christmas Oratorio* libretto adopt this same wording verbatim. Such a rendering is not terribly wrong, but a problem with its wording is that in the present day the last bit is often taken to mean "a large company of the great number of angels that are in heaven." That is, the term "host" is read anachronistically. The King James Bible uses the word "host" in Luke 2 in its older English sense of "army," not in its transferred sense as "a great number of something." The (singular) Greek word "stratias" underlying the (singular) English word "host" was rendered by Luther with the (plural) German word "Heerscharen." Either "Heer" ("army") or "Schar" ("band/flock/throng [of combatants]") might have met the case. Luther's compound term, however, conveys the sense that the mass of angels in Luke is neither simply a crowd nor simply a group of fighters but is an awe-inspiring structured army mass, and so we have settled on "the mass of the heavenly army formations [of angels]" as our rendering of his German.

⁵⁵Luke 2:14.

⁵⁶Both the underlying original Greek wording of Luke 2:14 and its significance have been strongly contested for centuries. The particular Greek source text that Luther used for translating the New Testament 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 (the traditional Latin translation of the Bible), going with the genitive, famously rendered the 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 easily suggested that God's mercy and grace could be merited, directly contradicting a central tenet of his 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 more readily understand the gospel passage in a way that he believed more clearly promotes a theology of "unmerited grace."

⁵⁷This line derives its sense from New Testament interpretation of Psalm 118:22-25, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Der Stein, den die Bauleute verworfen, ist zum Eckstein geworden. ... Dies ist der Tag, den der HERR macht; ... o HERR, lass wohl gelingen" ("The stone [i.e., the spiritual 'stone,' Jesus] that the builders [of the literal temple] have rejected is become the cornerstone [of the spiritual temple]. ... This [day of the 'cornerstone'] is the day that the LORD makes ... oh LORD, let [us] prosper well"). The *Christmas Oratorio* understands "this day [of the 'cornerstone']" to be the day of Christ's advent.

23. **Wir singen dir in deinem Heer
Aus aller Kraft Lob, Preis und Ehr,
Dass du, o lang gewünschter Gast,
Dich nunmehr eingestellet hast.**⁵⁸

23. **[Lord Jesus,] we sing to you, along with⁵⁹ your army⁶⁰
[of angels],⁶¹
With all [our] might, “laud, praise, and honor,”⁶²
That you, oh long desired guest [on earth],⁶³
Have now presented yourself.**

3. Teil

Part 3

24. Herrscher des Himmels, erhöre das Lallen,
Lass dir die matten Gesänge gefallen,
Wenn dich dein Zion mit Psalmen erhöht!
Höre der Herzen frohlockendes Preisen,
Wenn wir dir itzo die Ehrfurcht erweisen,
Weil unsre Wohlfahrt befestiget steht!

24. Ruler of heaven, give heed to⁶⁴ our⁶⁵ [well-intentioned]
babbling,⁶⁶
Let the [church’s] feeble songs be pleasing to you⁶⁷
When your [Christian] Zion⁶⁸ extols you with psalms.
Hear the hearts’ exultant praising
When we now show you reverence
Because our welfare is made certain.

25. *Und da die Engel von ihnen gen Himmel fuhren,
sprachen die Hirten untereinander:*⁶⁹

25. *And when the angels departed from them into
heaven, the shepherds declared to one another:*

⁵⁸A stanza of “Wir singen dir, Immanuel.”

⁵⁹In older German, the dative “in” was sometimes used where later German would use either “bei” in its senses of “along with” or “among,” or “unter” in its senses of “among” or “in the midst of.” The hymn speaks not of “you” (i.e., Jesus) listening amid the singing army of angels but of “we” (i.e., the church) singing, along with the angels, to “you.”

⁶⁰With regard to “Heer” as “host” in the sense of “army,” see fn. 54, above.

⁶¹A reference to Revelation 5:12, “und sie sprachen ... Das Lamm, ... ist würdig, zu nehmen ... Ehre und Preis und Lob “ (“And they [the thousands of angels] declared ... [Jesus,] the lamb [of God] ... is worthy to take/receive power, ... and honor, and praise, and laud”); similar language is employed of angels in Revelation 7:12. The idea of lines 1–2 from the hymn stanza is that in singing, Christians are supra-temporally praising God along with the angels, both at Jesus’s birth and at his final advent in the end time.

⁶²At the end-times, in Luther’s rendering of Revelation 5:12-13 and 7:12, angels sing the words “Lob, Preis und Ehr” (“laud, praise, and honor”) to the risen crucified Christ.

⁶³This line derives its sense from Jeremiah 14:8, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “warum stellet du dich, als wärest du ein Gast im Lande” (“why do you [God] present yourself as if you were a guest in the land [of Israel]?”) The hymn text appropriates Jeremiah’s negative language to speak in a positive manner of God’s earthly sojourn in the human body of Jesus.

⁶⁴“Erhören” carries the sense of “to hear” in its special sense of “to listen to with compliance or assent,” often employed in situations of acceding to or granting of a request or prayer.

⁶⁵This inarticulate babbling is that of “your Zion” in line 3, the church (not of the baby Jesus, the angels, or the shepherds).

⁶⁶In older German, “lallen” could mean “to babble like a child” or “to stammer like a drunk person or like people with intellectual disabilities” (Luther accused the Pope of this); it also could mean “to say or sing ‘la’ repeatedly.” The third meaning, in its literal musical sense, is unlikely here. The poetry is not asking God to take note that they are literally babbling or stammering or la-la-ing but to accept the well-meaning praise that they are not able to express properly or befittingly.

⁶⁷This draws on the sentiments of Psalm 119:108, “lass dir gefallen, HERR, das willige Opfer meines Mundes” (“let the willing offering of my mouth please you, LORD”).

⁶⁸“Your Zion” here refers to the church, understood as the new Zion, the “Israel of God” (on which, see fn. 73, below).

⁶⁹Luke 2:15a.

26. *Lasset uns nun gehen gen Bethlehem und die Geschichte sehen, die da geschehen ist, die uns der Herr kundgetan hat.*⁷⁰

26. *“Let us now go into Bethlehem and see the story⁷¹ that has happened there, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

27. Er hat sein Volk getröst,
Er hat sein Israel erlöst,
Die Hilf aus Zion hergesendet
Und unser Leid geendet.
Seht, Hirten, dies hat er getan;
Geht, dieses trifft ihr an!

27. He [the Lord God] has comforted his people,
He has redeemed his [Christian]⁷² Israel,
Sent salvation⁷³ out of Zion,
And ended our suffering.⁷⁴
Look, shepherds, this he has done;
Go, you will come upon this.

28. **Dies⁷⁵ hat er alles uns getan,
Sein gross Lieb zu zeigen an;
Des freu sich alle Christenheit
Und dank ihm des in Ewigkeit.
Kyrieleis!**⁷⁶

28. **All this he has done for us
To show his great love;
For this let all of Christendom be glad
And thus⁷⁷ thank him in eternity.
Lord, have mercy!**

29. Herr, dein Mitleid, dein Erbarmen

29. Lord, your compassion, your mercy

⁷⁰Luke 2:15b.

⁷¹The term Luke’s gospel uses is “rheima,” which normally means “word”; in Luke it is a semitism, translating the Hebrew “davar,” which carries the double meaning of “word” and “deed.” (Thus, many English translations of the Bible here read “see this thing [or, ‘event’] that has taken place.”) To capture both senses of “davar” in one word in German and in English is difficult. Luther brilliantly opts for “Geschichte,” which means both “history” (“events,” or “deeds”) and “narrative” (“words”). One of several older-German definitions of the word “Geschichte” given in historical dictionaries was “[eine] plötzliche Naturerscheinung, ursprünglich als eine Himmelschickung aufgefasst, an die sich eine Vorbedeutung knüpfte” (“[a] sudden natural phenomenon, originally perceived to be an act of God, tied in with an omen”), and Luther may have been also drawing on this sense. His biblical phrase “Die Geschichte sehen” (“to see the history/narrative”) is a bit odd in German, and though our translation of Luther is awkward, we hope we have successfully reflected his double sense with the rendering, “see the story.” The idea in Luke 2:15 is that the birth of Jesus is a “deed” from God, one that “speaks” to humankind.

⁷²With regard to “his Israel” being the church (the “Israel of God”), see fn. 73, below.

⁷³“Hilf[e]” (literally, “help”) is one of Luther’s renderings of the term “[eternal] salvation.” Lines 2–3 draw on Luther’s understanding of his rendering of what was taken in traditional Christian interpretation to be a key messianic prayer in Psalm 14:7 (quoted here with the central parts of its Lutheran glosses from the Calov commentary Bible, which Bach owned, provided between m-dashes and in italics), “Ach dass die Hilfe—... *Jesus*...—aus Zion über Israel käme—... *dessen sich der Israel Gottes ... erfreuet, Gal. VI.16*—, und der HERR sein gefangen Volk—*das in der Sünden, des Todes, und des Teufels Gewalt ist, Col. I.13*—erlösete” (“Ah that salvation—... *Jesus* ...—might come over Israel, out of Zion—*of which the ‘Israel of God’ rejoices, Galatians 6:16*—, and the LORD might redeem his captive people—[i.e., *the Israel*] that is in the power of sin, death, and the devil”). The “Israel of God” was understood in traditional Christian interpretation to be synonymous with what in traditional Christian interpretation was called “spiritual Israel” or “true Israel” or “New Israel” (the church), as opposed to “carnal Israel” or “Old Israel” (the synagogue).

⁷⁴The background here for the expression of a contrast between “salvation” and “suffering” lies in Luther’s translation and interpretation of a key biblical passage, Isaiah 40:2, “Redet mit Jerusalem freundlich; und prediget ihr, dass ihre Ritterschaft ein Ende hat” (“Speak [you prophets] in a friendly way with Jerusalem, and preach to her that her difficult obligation has [come to] an end”). Luther considered this “Ritterschaft” (“difficult obligation”) to be the life of sin under the law of Moses. Lutheranism taught that Jesus, God’s messiah, came to forgive sin through grace, and to free people from that of which the law accuses them.

⁷⁵In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants, this reads not “Dies” (“this”) but “Das” (here, “that”). There is no real difference in meaning, however, between the whole phrases “Dies hat er alles uns getan” (“All this [saving and redeeming] he has done for us”) and “Das hat er alles uns getan” (“He has done all that [saving and redeeming] for us”).

⁷⁶A stanza of “Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ.”

⁷⁷“Des” here is used here in its sense of “deshalb” (“thus”).

Tröstet uns und macht uns frei.
Deine holde Gunst und Liebe,
Deine wundersamen Triebe
Machen deine Vätertreu
Wieder neu.

Comforts us and sets us free.
Your gracious favor and love,
Your wondrous impulses,
Make your paternal faithfulness
New again [every morning].⁷⁸

30. *Und sie kamen eilend und funden beide*⁷⁹ *Mariam und Joseph, dazu das Kind in der Krippe liegen. Da sie es aber gesehen hatten, breiteten sie das Wort aus, welches zu ihnen von diesem Kind gesaget war. Und alle, für die es kam, wunderten*⁸⁰ *sich der Rede, die ihnen die Hirten gesaget hatten. Maria aber behielt alle diese Worte und bewegte sie in ihrem Herzen.*⁸¹

30. *And they [the shepherds] came hurrying and found both Mary*⁸² *and Joseph, [and] in addition the child [who was]*⁸³ *lying in the manger. But when they had seen it [the infant, Jesus], they spread the word that had been told to them of this child. And all who met with*⁸⁴ *it [the word] were surprised at the account that the shepherds had told them. But Mary kept all these words and turned them over*⁸⁵ *within her heart.*

31. Schliesse, mein Herze, dies selige Wunder
Fest in deinem Glauben ein!
Lasse dies Wunder, die göttlichen Werke,
Immer zur Stärke
Deines schwachen Glaubens sein!

31. My heart, seal this blessed marvel [of Christ's advent]
Steadfastly within your faith.
Let this marvel, the divine deeds,
Be ever [a means] for [increasing] the strength
Of your weak faith.

32. Ja, ja, mein Herz soll es bewahren,
Was es an dieser holden Zeit

32. Yes, yes, my heart shall safeguard
What it, at this merciful/gracious⁸⁶ time [of Christ's advent]

⁷⁸The last two lines derive their sense from Lamentations 3:22-23, "seine Barmherzigkeit ... ist alle Morgen neu, und deine Treu ist gross" ("his [the LORD's] mercy ... is new every morning, and great is your [the LORD's] faithfulness").

⁷⁹There is no comma after the word "beide" ("both") in Bach's own score, or in the original performing part, or in the printed libretto booklet that was made available to Bach's fellow congregants (also, all three do have a comma after "Joseph" but none after "Kind" ["child"]). Bach, apparently confused by the text (with regard to Luther's wording, see also fn. 83, below), at first wrote "funden Mariam," and then wrote "beide" over the word "Mariam," and then wrote "Mariam" a second time, yielding not "funden Mariam und Joseph" ("found Mary and Joseph"), but "funden beide Mariam und Joseph" ("found both Mary and Joseph").

⁸⁰In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not "wunderten" ("were surprised") but "verwunderten," there used in its sense of a heightened form of "wunderten." The standard reading in the Luther Bibles was "wunderten."

⁸¹Luke 2:16-19.

⁸²"The spelling "Mariam" is not a cross between the Latin "Maria" and the Hebrew "Miriam." The Luther Bibles sometimes gave "Maria" and sometimes "Mariam" as the accusative and dative forms of "Maria" ("Mary").

⁸³Luther's wording and syntax (even without a comma after "Kind" ["child"]) can readily project the (unintended) sense that the shepherds found not only the baby Jesus but also his parents lying in the manger. Some modern printings of the libretto remove the comma after "Joseph," implying a logical (but textually unwarranted) understanding in which the referents for the "both" are not "1) Mary" and "2) Joseph," but "1) Mary and Joseph" and "2) the child lying in the manger."

⁸⁴Luther's "für ... kam" is the older-German form of the separable verb "vorkommen" (in this context, "to meet with"; literally, "to come before," i.e., "to come into the presence of").

⁸⁵Luke's verb "symballein" means literally "to throw side by side." The denotation of Luther's "bewegen" here is the same as "erwägen" ("to contemplate," "to ponder"), but the connotations of "bewegen" are more vigorous.

⁸⁶The adjective "hold" is apparently being used here as a synonym for "gnädig" in its theological sense of "full of mercy/grace" or "abounding in mercy/grace," the way it was employed of God in Sirach 3:20, "Je höher du bist, je mehr dich demütige: so wird dir der HERR hold sein" ("humble yourself the more, the greater you are; then the LORD will be merciful/gracious to you").

Zu seiner Seligkeit
Für sicheren Beweis erfahren.

Has experienced as certain proof
For its [eternal] blessedness [of salvation],

**33. Ich will dich mit Fleiss bewahren,
Ich will dir
Leben hier,
Dir will ich abfahren,
Mit dir will ich endlich schweben
Voller Freud
Ohne Zeit
Dort im andern Leben.⁸⁷**

**33. I will safeguard you [in heart and mind] with diligence;
I will live to you
Here [on earth];⁸⁸
To you will I [go when I] depart [this life];
With you will I [like an angel] hover⁸⁹ [in heaven] at last,
Full of joy,
Without [earthly] temporality,
There in the afterlife.**

34. Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um, preiseten und lobten Gott um alles, das sie gesehen und gehöret hatten, wie denn zu ihnen gesaget war.⁹⁰

34. And the shepherds returned [to the field] again, praising and lauding God for all that they had seen and heard, [which was] just as had been told to them.

**35. Seid froh dieweil,
Dass⁹¹ euer Heil
Ist hie⁹² ein Gott und auch ein Mensch geboren,
Der, welcher ist
Der Herr und Christ
In Davids Stadt, von vielen auserkoren.⁹³**

**35. Be joyful therefore,
Because your salvation
Has been born here [on earth as] a god and also a human being;
He who is
The Lord and Christ,
[Born] in [Bethlehem,] the city of David,⁹⁴ [Jesus, the servant,] chosen [by God] from [among] many.⁹⁵**

Chorus 1. [Nr. 24] ab initio repetatur

The first chorus [No. 24] is repeated from the beginning

⁸⁷A stanza of “Fröhlich soll mein Herze springen.”

⁸⁸This language comes from Romans 14:8, “Leben wir, so leben wir dem HERRN; sterben wir, so sterben wir dem HERRN” (“If we live, then we live to the LORD; if we die, then we die to the LORD”). “To live/die to the Lord” is a biblical expression whose meaning is “to live/die for the sake of God’s will.”

⁸⁹It is worth mentioning that the leading eighteenth-century German dictionary notes: “[das Wort ‘schweben’ ist] jetzt wegen des vielen Missbrauchs der Dichter platt und ungeschmack geworden” (“[the word ‘schweben’ has] now become flat and insipid on account of the many abuses of the poets”).

⁹⁰Luke 2:20.

⁹¹In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants, this reads not “Dass” (“that”) but “Nun” (“now”), a reading found in some hymnbooks; one of the original performing parts here reads “jetzt” (which also means “now”), a reading found in some hymnals. Bach may have given “dass” simply by mistake in working from memory (see also fn. 37, above, and fn. 92, below).

⁹²In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants and in the hymn books, this reads not “hie” (“here”) but “heut” (“this day”). Bach may have given “hie” simply by mistake in working from memory (see also fn. 91 and fn. 37, above)

⁹³A stanza of “Lasst Furcht und Pein.”

⁹⁴With regard to Bethlehem as “the city of David” (Jerusalem was also called “the city of David”), see fn. 9, above.

⁹⁵This somewhat tortuous language reflects Lutheran christological interpretation of Luther’s idiosyncratic rendering of Song of Songs 5:10, “Mein Freund ist weiss und rot, auserkoren unter vielen Tausenden” (“My beloved one [understood as a foreshadowing of God’s messiah, Jesus] is white and ruddy, chosen [by God from] among many thousands”). Parallel language is found in Sirach 45:4, “Er hat ihn auserkoren zum heiligen Stande, ... aus allen Menschen erwählet” (“He [God] chose him [Moses] for the holy estate, [to serve as the one who would lead Israel out of Egypt], ... selected [him] out of all humankind”). Jesus is explicitly described as having been “chosen/selected” (Luther: “erwählt”) by God, as his servant, in Matthew 12:18.

4. Teil

Part 4

36. Fallt mit Danken, fällt mit Loben
Vor des Höchsten Gnadenthron!
Gottes Sohn
Will der⁹⁶ Erden
Heiland und Erlöser⁹⁷ werden,
Gottes Sohn
Dämpft der Feinde⁹⁸ Wut und Toben.

36. Bow with thanksgiving, bow with lauding
Before [God] the Most High's throne of grace!
God's son [Jesus]
Will become the earth's
Savior and redeemer;
God's son
Dampens the enemies' fury and rage.

37. *Und da acht Tage um waren, dass das Kind
beschnitten würde, da ward sein Name genennet Jesus,
welcher genennet war von dem Engel, ehe denn er im
Mutterleibe empfangen ward.*⁹⁹

37. *And when eight days were up, [such] that the child
would be circumcised,¹⁰⁰ then its name was called
Jesus,¹⁰¹ which [name he] was called by the angel even
before he was conceived in the womb.*

38. Immanuel, o süßes Wort!
Mein Jesus heisst mein Hort,¹⁰²
Mein Jesus heisst mein Leben.
Mein Jesus hat sich mir ergeben;
Mein Jesus soll mir immerfort
Vor meinen Augen schweben.
Mein Jesus heisset meine Lust,
Mein Jesus labet Herz und Brust.

38. [Jesus,]¹⁰⁶ “Emmanuel [‘God with us’],” oh sweet word!
My Jesus is called “my refuge”;
My Jesus is called “my life.”
My Jesus has given himself over to me;
My Jesus shall always henceforth
Hover¹⁰⁷ [as a spirit] before my eyes.
My Jesus is called “my delight”;
My Jesus refreshes [my] heart and breast.

**Jesu, du mein liebstes Leben,
Meiner Seelen Bräutigam,
Komm! Ich will dich mit Lust umfassen,**

**Jesus, you [who are]¹⁰⁸ my most beloved life,
My soul's bridegroom,
Come; with delight I will embrace you,**

⁹⁶In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not “der Erden” (“the earth's”) but “auf Erden” (“on earth”).

⁹⁷In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not “Heiland und Erlöser” (“savior and redeemer”) but “Unser aller Heiland” (“savior of us all”).

⁹⁸In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not “der Feinde” (“the enemies'”) but “der Hölle” (“hell's”).

⁹⁹Luke 2:21.

¹⁰⁰Lutheranism taught that the shedding of blood in Jesus's circumcision was a prefiguring of his crucifixion. (Theologically, Jesus's circumcision was otherwise considered a potential Christian embarrassment, i.e., in its being a Jewish legal practice.) The libretto's very next movement meditates on the crucifixion: “Jesus, ... Der du dich vor mich gegeben / An des bittern Kreuzes Stamm” (“Jesus, ... You who has given himself for me / On the trunk of the bitter cross”).

¹⁰¹Luther rendered literally Luke's (technically, tautological) semitism, “name was called.”

¹⁰²In Bach's own score this reads “Hirt” (“shepherd”), which is presumably a copying error, as in the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants this reads “Hort” (“refuge”), which rhymes with the previous line's “Wort” (“word”), and the original performing part was corrected, apparently by Bach, from “Hirt” to “Hort.”

¹⁰⁶“Emmanuel” is Hebrew for “God with us”; Jesus is called “Emmanuel” in Matthew 1:23.

¹⁰⁷With regard to the use/abuse of the word “schweben” (“to hover”), see fn. 89, above.

¹⁰⁸For Jesus as “my life,” see also line 2 in movement 59.

Mein Herze soll dich nimmer lassen.

Der du dich vor mich gegeben

An des bittern Kreuzes Stamm,¹⁰³

Ach, so nimm mich zu dir!

Auch in dem Sterben sollst du mir

Das Allerliebste sein;

In Not, Gefahr und Ungemach

Seh ich dir sehnlichst nach.

Was jagte¹⁰⁴ mir zuletzt der Tod für Grauen¹⁰⁵ ein?

Mein Jesus! Wenn ich sterbe,

So weiss ich, dass ich nicht verderbe.

Dein Name steht in mir geschrieben,

Der hat des Todes Furcht vertrieben.

[In life on earth] my heart shall never leave you.

You who has given himself for me

On the trunk¹⁰⁹ **of the bitter cross,**

Ah, so [via death, also,] take me to you [in heaven]!¹¹⁰

Even in dying shall you be to me

The most beloved of all;

In need, danger, and affliction

I gaze after you most longingly.

What kind of dread might death, in the end,¹¹¹ put into me?¹¹²

My Jesus, I know that when I die,

I will not be condemned to hell.¹¹³

[For] your [saving] name is inscribed within me;¹¹⁴

It [for me] has driven out the fear of death.

39. Flösst, mein Heiland, flösst dein¹¹⁵ Namen

Auch den allerkleinsten Samen

Jenes strengen Schreckens ein?

39. Does, my savior, does your name instill

Even the very tiniest seed

¹⁰³Lines 1–4 of the first stanza of this hymn (which is set here, however, to a new melody by Bach).

¹⁰⁴In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not "jagte Grauen ein" ("might put dread into") but "jaget Grauen ein" ("puts dread into," "does put dread into").

¹⁰⁵In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not "Grauen" ("dread") but "Trauren" ("grief," "mourning"), which is presumably a typographical error.

¹⁰⁹The "Kreuzes Stamm" does indeed refer to the "stipes" (the vertical beam, the trunk) of the cross, as opposed to the "patible" or "patibulum" (the horizontal beam), but not for any apparent narrative or theological reason. In religious poetry the three syllables of "Kreuzes Stamm" were often employed simply to provide a convenient end-rhyme for one of several standard, three-syllable designations for Jesus: "Brautigam" ("bridegroom," i.e., of his "bride," the church), "Gottes Lamm" ("[passover/Easter] lamb of God"), or "Oster Lamm" ("[passover lamb as] Easter lamb").

¹¹⁰This line apparently derives its sense from similar, formulaic uses of the phrase "so nimm" ("so take") in two key biblical passages: Jonah 4:3, where the prophet Jonah, praying to die, says to God, "So nimm doch nun, HERR, meine Seele von mir, denn ich wollte lieber tot sein, denn leben" ("So take please now, LORD, my soul from me, for I would rather be dead than live"); and 1 Kings 19:4, where the prophet Elijah, praying to die, says to God, "Es ist genug, so nimm nun, HERR, meine Seele" ("It is enough [already, this living and suffering], so take my soul now, LORD").

¹¹¹"Zuletzt" had a variety of related meanings in older German; here the word is apparently used the way it is used in the rendering of Job 20:7 in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day, "wird er ... zuletzt umkommen, wie ein Dreck" ("he [the hypocrite] will perish [i.e., 'rot'] in the end, like a piece of excrement").

¹¹²For this somewhat awkward expression, compare Isaiah 21:4, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach's day reads "Grauen hat mich erschreckt" ("dread has alarmed me"); some later Luther Bibles changed this to "Grauen hat mich betäubt" ("dread has benumbed me").

¹¹³In older German, "verderben" had a wide variety of meanings; here it is used in its sense of "der ewigen Verdammnis anheimfallen" ("to fall prey of eternal damnation," i.e., "to 'rot' in hell").

¹¹⁴Inscribed, namely, in the heart: 2 Corinthians 3:3, "ihr ein Brief Christi seid, durch unser Predigamt zubereitet, und durch uns geschrieben, nicht mit Tinte, sondern mit dem Geist des lebendigen Gottes, nicht in steinern Tafeln, sondern in fleischern Tafeln des Herzens" ("you [Corinthians] are an 'epistle' of Christ, prepared by our ministry of preaching, and inscribed by us [the apostle Paul, and Timothy], not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not in stone tablets [as with the law of Moses] but [as with the gospel of Christ] in flesh tablets of the heart"). See also the first two lines of movement 40.

¹¹⁵In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not "dein" ("your") but "den" ("the"; or in this context, "your").

Nein, du sagst ja selber nein;
Sollt ich nun das Sterben scheuen?
Nein, dein süßes Wort ist da!
Oder sollt ich mich erfreuen?
Ja, du Heiland sprichst selbst ja.

40. Wohlan, dein Name soll allein
In meinem Herzen sein!
**Jesu, meine Freud und Wonne,
Meine Hoffnung, Schatz und Teil,**
So will ich dich entzückt nennen,
Wenn Brust und Herz zu dir vor Liebe brennen.
Mein Erlösung, Schmuck und Heil,¹¹⁷
Doch, Liebster, sage mir:
Wie rühm ich dich, wie dank ich dir?
**Hirt und König, Licht und Sonne,
Ach! wie soll ich würdiglich,
Mein Herr Jesu, preisen dich?**¹¹⁸

41. Ich will nur dir zu Ehren leben,
Mein Heiland, gib¹²⁰ mir Kraft und Mut,
Dass es mein Herz recht eifrig tut!
Stärke mich,
Deine Gnade würdiglich
Und mit Danken zu erheben!

42. **Jesus richte mein Beginnen,
Jesus bleibe stets bei mir,
Jesus zäume mir die Sinnen,
Jesus sei nur mein Begier,
Jesus sei mir in Gedanken,**

Of that stark horror [of the Day of Judgment]?¹¹⁶
No, you yourself, yes, say “no”;
Should I now shy away from [the harsh truth of] dying?
No, your sweet word is there!
Or should I rejoice?
Yes, you yourself, savior, declare “yes.”

40. Surely your name alone shall
Be in my heart!¹¹⁹
**Jesus, my joy and bliss,
My hope, treasure, and portion,**
These I, enraptured, will call you,
When [my] breast and heart burn with love for you.
My redemption, adornment, and salvation,
Yet, [my] most beloved, tell me:
How may I glorify you, how may I thank you?
**Shepherd and king, light and sun,—
Ah!—how shall I worthily
Praise you, my Lord Jesus?**

41. I will live only in your honor;
My savior, give me might and courage,
That my heart will do this right zealously.
Strengthen me
To [be able to] exalt your grace worthily
And with thanksgiving.

42. **May Jesus direct my embarking [upon a new year];¹²³
May Jesus ever remain with me;
May Jesus bridle my [evil] inclinations;
May Jesus only be my desire;
May Jesus [ever] be in my [devotional] thoughts;**

¹¹⁶The subject of not having fear of being condemned eternally to hell (which, were such damnation to happen, would be decided or confirmed, according to Lutheran teaching, on the Day of Judgment, at the end time) was brought up near the end of the previous movement).

¹¹⁷The text reads “Mein Erlösung, Schmuck und Heil” (“My redemption, adornment, and salvation”) in Bach’s score and in the printed libretto booklets made available to his fellow congregants. In Bach’s original performing parts, his copyist evidently misread the score and wrote “Mein Erlöser, Schutz und Heil” (“my redeemer, bulwark, and salvation”). The copyist’s reading corresponds to none of the known hymnbooks of Bach’s day.

¹¹⁸Lines 5–10 of the first stanza of “Jesu, du mein liebstes Leben” (which is set here, however, to a new melody by Bach; cf. movement 38).

¹¹⁹With regard to the name of Jesus and the believer’s heart, see fn. 114, above.

¹²⁰In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants, this reads not “gib” (“give,” imperative) but “gibt” (“gives,” indicative), which is presumably a typographical error (this and the next verb are in the imperative in Bach’s materials).

¹²³This part of the *Christmas Oratorio* was first performed on Saturday, 1 January 1735, and the subject matter of the many verses of the hymn from which this stanza is drawn concerns prayers for a blessed new year.

Jesu, lasse mich nicht¹²¹ wanken!¹²²

5. Teil

43. Ehre sei dir, Gott, gesungen,
Dir sei Lob und Dank bereit.
Dich erhebet alle Welt,
Weil dir unser Wohl gefällt,
Weil anheut
Unser aller Wunsch gelungen,
Weil uns dein Segen so herrlich erfreut.

44. *Da Jesus geboren war zu Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande zur Zeit des Königes Herodis, siehe, da kamen die Weisen vom Morgenlande gen Jerusalem und sprachen.*¹²⁷

45. *Wo ist der neugeborne König der Juden?*
Sucht ihn in meiner Brust,
Hier wohnt er, mir und ihm zur Lust!

Jesus, let me not waver [in faith].¹²⁴

Part 5

43. May honor, God, be sung unto you,
May laud and thanks be given¹²⁵ to you.
All the world exalts you,
Because our well-being pleases you,
Because this day
The wish of us all has come true,
Because your blessing [of salvation]¹²⁶ gladdens us so gloriously.

44. *When Jesus was born at Bethlehem in the Jewish region¹²⁸ at the time of King Herod, look, then the wisemen from the Orient came to Jerusalem, declaring:*

45. *“Where is the newborn King of the Jews?”*¹³¹
Seek him in my breast;
He dwells here, to my and his delight!

¹²¹In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants, this reads not “nicht” (“not”) but “nie” (“never”). The contemporary hymnbooks read either “lasse nie mich wanken” (“never let me waver”) or “lasse mich nie wanken” (“let me never waver”).

¹²²A stanza of “Hilf, Herr Jesu, lass gelingen.”

¹²⁴The sentiment of this line is derived from Hebrews 10:23, “lasset uns halten an dem Bekenntnis der Hoffnung und nicht wanken” (“let us keep to the profession of hope [in faith] and not waver”).

¹²⁵“Bereit” is not an adjective here (“ready”) but a poetically clipped verb, “bereit[et]” (here, “given”), as in the phrase “jemandem Freude bereiten” (“to give pleasure to someone”).

¹²⁶This “blessing [of salvation]” is “the blessing of Abraham” of Genesis 12:3 that was alluded to in the first line of movement 14 (see fn. 43, above), namely the blessing of God that would be extended to all nations. In Christian belief this occurred through God’s messiah, Jesus, as proclaimed in Galatians 3:13-14, “Christus aber hat uns erlöst von dem Fluch des Gesetzes, da er ward ein Fluch für uns ... auf dass der Segen Abrahams unter die Heiden käme, in Christo Jesu, und wir also den verheissenen Geist empfangen durch den Glauben” (“But Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law [of Moses], when [on the cross] he became a curse for us ... so that, in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come among the gentiles, and we thus might receive, through faith, the promised spirit [of the LORD]”).

¹²⁷Matthew 2:1.

¹²⁸In a few particular contexts Luther does translate the Bible’s “Ioudaia” (the word here in Matthew’s Greek) as “Judäa” (“Judea”), but for the most part he renders it “das jüdische Land” (“the Jewish land/region”).

¹³¹Herod was known by the title “King of the Jews,” according to the first-century historian Flavius Josephus. Suggesting this title for Jesus would represent a direct challenge to Herod.

*Wir haben seinen Stern gesehen im Morgenlande und sind kommen, ihn anzubeten.*¹²⁹

Wohl euch, die ihr dies¹³⁰ Licht gesehen,
Es ist zu eurem Heil geschehen!
Mein Heiland, du, du bist das Licht,
Das auch den Heiden scheinen sollen,
Und sie, sie kennen dich noch nicht,
Als sie dich schon verehren wollen.
Wie hell, wie klar muss nicht dein Schein,
Geliebter Jesu, sein!

**46. Dein Glanz all Finsternis verzehrt,
Die trübe Nacht in Licht verkehrt.
Leit uns auf deinen Wegen,
Dass dein Gesicht
Und herrlichs Licht
Wir ewig schauen mögen!**¹³⁶

47. Erleucht auch meine finstre Sinnen,
Erleuchte mein Herze
Durch der Strahlen klaren Schein!
Dein Wort soll mir die hellste Kerze
In allen meinen Werken sein;
Dies lasset die Seele nichts Böses beginnen.

48. *Da das der König Herodes hörte, erschrak er und mit ihm das ganze Jerusalem.*¹³⁸

“We have seen his star¹³² in the Orient, and are come to worship¹³³ him.”

Well for you, you [foreigners] who have seen this light;
It is [also]¹³⁴ for your salvation [that this light has] come about!
You, my savior, you are the light
That shall shine also to the gentiles,
And they [the gentiles],¹³⁵ they do not know you yet,
[At a time] when they [nevertheless] already want to revere you.
How bright, [then,] how clear must not your luminosity be,
Beloved Jesus!

**46. Your radiance consumes all darkness,
Turns the murky night into light.
Lead us along your pathways,
That we may behold your visage
And glorious light
Eternally.**

47. Light up, too, my dark inclinations,
Light up my heart
By the clear luminosity of [your] streams [of light]!
Your word shall be the brightest candle to me
In all my [good] works;
This will not let the soul embark upon anything evil.¹³⁷

48. *When Herod the King heard this [that a king of the Jews was portended], he was alarmed, and with him the whole [population of] Jerusalem.*

¹²⁹Matthew 2:2.

¹³⁰In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not “dies” (“this”) but “das” (“the”; or, “that”).

¹³²Such (miraculous) stars were believed in the ancient world to attend the birth of a great person.

¹³³There is some debate as to whether the Gospel of Matthew should here be understood as saying that Jesus is “paid homage to” (as a king) or “worshiped” (as a divine figure). Luther’s “anzubeten” (literally, “to pray to”) has the latter connotation.

¹³⁴That is, this salvation through Jesus comes to Jews who have faith in him and to gentiles who have faith in him, as is expressed explicitly in the next lines, “Mein Heiland, du, du bist das Licht, / Das auch den Heiden scheinen sollen” (“You, my savior, you are the light / That shall shine [not only to the Jews but] also to the gentiles”).

¹³⁵As exemplified by these wisemen from the east.

¹³⁶A stanza of “Nun, liebe Seel, nun ist es Zeit.”

¹³⁷More literally (but also more clumsily) this line is “This lets the soul embark upon nothing evil.”

¹³⁸Matthew 2:3.

49. Warum wollt ihr¹³⁹ erschrecken?
Kann meines Jesu Gegenwart
Euch solche Furcht erwecken?
O! solltet ihr euch nicht
Vielmehr darüber freuen,
Weil er dadurch verspricht,
Der Menschen Wohlfahrt zu verneuen.

49. Why would you¹⁴⁰ [Herod and Jerusalem] be alarmed?
Can the presence of my Jesus
Arouse such fear in you?
Oh! Should you not,
To the contrary, be glad about that,
Because he promises [with his presence] thereby
To renew the welfare of humankind.

50. *Und liess versammeln alle Hohepriester und Schriftgelehrten unter dem Volk und erforschte von ihnen, wo Christus sollte geboren werden. Und sie sagten ihm: Zu Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande; denn also stehet geschrieben durch den Propheten: Und du Bethlehem im jüdischen Lande bist mitnichten die kleinst unter den Fürsten Juda; denn aus dir soll mir kommen der Herzog, der über mein Volk Israel ein Herr sei.*¹⁴¹

50. *And [Herod] had all the chief priests¹⁴² and scholars of scripture¹⁴³ [from] among the people gather and inquired of them, where Christ¹⁴⁴ was expected to be born. And they told him: “At Bethlehem in the Jewish region;¹⁴⁵ for so it is written by the prophet,¹⁴⁶ [Thus declares the Lord:] And you Bethlehem in the Jewish region are by no means¹⁴⁷ the least significant¹⁴⁸ [city] among the princes¹⁴⁹ of Judah; for out of you*

¹³⁹In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants, this reads not “wollt[et] ihr” (“would you [plural] want”) but “wollt[e] ich” (“would I”), which is presumably an error.

¹⁴⁰Regarding the pronoun here, see fn. 139, above.

¹⁴¹Matthew 2:4-6.

¹⁴²Luther Bibles of Bach’s day use “die Hohepriester” (plural) to refer to the rotation of priests who worked in the Jerusalem Temple, and “der Hohepriester” (singular) to the head priest of them all. Partly to avoid potential narrative confusion, it became conventional in English translations of the Bible to call the former “the chief priests” and the latter “the high priest.” The original Greek of the New Testament text gives “hoi archiereis” (literally, “the chief priests”) and “ho archiereus” (literally, “the chief priest”).

¹⁴³This group consisted of men who copied biblical writings on scrolls and were learned in Mosaic laws and teachings. The standard English translation “scribe” might seem to overemphasize the writing component of their duties, while Luther’s rendering “Schriftgelehrten” (literally, “scripture scholars”) would seem to place the greater emphasis on their biblical learning.

¹⁴⁴The text of Matthew reads “where the ‘christos’ was to be born,” i.e., “where the messiah [God’s ‘anointed one’] was [expected] to be born.” Luther and some other translators do not accommodate Matthew’s “the,” thereby having their texts read “where [Jesus] Christ was [expected] to be born.”

¹⁴⁵In a few particular contexts Luther does translate the Bible’s “Ioudaia” (the word here in Matthew’s Greek) as “Judäa” (“Judea”), but for the most part he renders it “das jüdische Land” (“the Jewish land/region”).

¹⁴⁶A combination of Micah 5:1 and 2 Samuel 5:2.

¹⁴⁷Matthew refers to Bethlehem in this way (i.e., the gospel adds the expression “by no means”) presumably to counter the Hebrew Scriptures, where Bethlehem is generally considered insignificant. In Matthew the birth of Jesus makes the city great.

¹⁴⁸Literally, “the smallest.”

¹⁴⁹The now standard Hebrew text (the “Masoretic Text”) of Micah here reads “elephe” (“thousands,” “clans”) but the Hebrew of the (consonants-only) ancient text could have been provided with different vowels to yield “alluphe” (“princes”), and this would explain how Matthew arrived at “princes” in citing Micah. The same ambiguity underlies the words translated in English Bibles either as “clans” or “dukes” in the genealogies of Genesis 36:15-43 and 1 Chronicles 1:51-54 (Luther there opts for “Fürsten” [“princes”]).

*shall come unto me¹⁵⁰ the leader¹⁵¹ who would be a
[divine] lord¹⁵² over my people Israel. ’’*

51. Ach, wenn wird die Zeit erscheinen?
Ach, wenn kömmt der Trost
Der Seinen?
Schweigt, er ist schon wirklich hier!
Jesu, ach so komm zu mir!

51. Ah, when will the time [of the kingdom of God]¹⁵³ appear?
Ah, when is [God’s messiah,] the consolation of
Those who [shall] belong to him, coming?
Be silent!—he¹⁵⁴ is actually already here!
Jesus, ah, then come to me.

52. Mein Liebster herrschet schon.
Ein Herz, das seine Herrschaft liebet
Und sich ihm ganz zu eigen gibet,
Ist meines Jesu Thron.

52. My most beloved already [in infancy] rules [as messiah].
A heart [of mine] that loves his [the messiah’s] dominion,
And wholly gives itself to him to possess,
Is the throne of my Jesus.

53. Zwar ist solche Herzensstube

53. True, such a heart’s chamber¹⁵⁷ is

¹⁵⁰“Unto/For me” does not appear in the best Greek texts of Matthew. This expression was inserted into some Greek manuscripts of Matthew on the basis of Micah 5:1, which the Luther Bibles rendered “Und du, Bethlehem Ephrata, die du klein bist unter den Tausenden in Juda, aus dir soll mir der kommen, der in Israel HERR [or, ‘Herr’] sei” ([God says,] “And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, you who are small [i.e., insignificant] among the thousands in Judah, out of you shall come unto me the one who in Israel would be [the] LORD [or, ‘(a) lord’]”). With regard to the significance of upper-case orthography for “Herr,” see fn. 152, below.

¹⁵¹To render “Herzog” here as “duke” (an aristocratic title higher than a count but lower than a king) might be technically correct but would sound too awkward. “Duke” comes from the Latin “dux” (“leader”), and “Herzog” comes from combining the noun “Heer” (“army”) and the past tense of the verb “ziehen” (“to draw or pull”); thus a “Herzog” or “duke” is literally or figuratively “a military leader.” The word was employed in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day and earlier to refer to leaders who were not aristocratic political rulers of a duchy. In 1 Samuel 25:30 and 2 Samuel 5:2 in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day, King David is rendered a “Herzog [Hebrew, ‘nagiyd’ (literally, ‘one in front’)] over Israel”; and in Hebrews 2:10, Jesus is called a “Herzog der Seligkeit” (“captain” [or, ‘pioneer’; Greek, ‘archegos’ (‘chief leader’)] of [eternal] ‘blessedness’ [or, ‘salvation’]).

¹⁵²Matthew speaks here of the one “who will shepherd [i.e., rule] my people Israel,” but the Luther Bibles rendered this phrase as “who would be a ‘HERR’/‘Herr’ over my people Israel.” The word “Herr,” with only its “H” in upper-case, can simply mean “lord” in one of its senses of “master” or “ruler,” but the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day (e.g., the Olearius commentary Bible that Bach owned) often, if not typically, gave the word in partial or all upper-case letters here in Matthew 2:6 (“HERR,” or “HErr,” is an orthographical convention signifying explicitly that the divine “Lord [God]” is being spoken of, and this convention was followed for movement 50 in the printed libretto booklets that were made available to Bach’s fellow congregants; in this context, “Israel” could be taken to mean not “Old Israel,” the synagogue, but “New Israel,” the church [see also movement 27]). Whether upper-cased or not, the choice of “Herr” in the Luther Bibles is tendentious, as the direct senses of the underlying terms in both Micah and Matthew could easily and readily have been captured altogether straightforwardly with the German words “Herrscher” (“ruler”), “Fürst” (“prince”), or “Hirt” (“shepherd”), the terms that the later German Bibles do employ.

¹⁵³As queried in Luke 17:20.

¹⁵⁴Grammatically and semantically, this “er,” understood as “he,” can refer to “him” (Jesus), or as “it,” to “der Trost” (“the consolation”), or “er” could refer to both simultaneously. The line may also be drawing on Romans 8:34-35, which Luther idiosyncratically rendered as “Wer will die Auserwählten Gottes beschuldigen? Gott ist hier, der da gerecht macht. Wer will verdammen? Christus ist hier, der gestorben ist, ja vielmehr, der auch auferweckt ist” (“Who [is there that] will [be able to] charge those chosen of God? God [who has mercy] is here, who does make [people] justified [for eternal salvation]. Who [is there that] will [be able to] condemn [to eternal damnation]? Christ [who redeems and consoles] is here, who has died, yes rather, who also has been raised [from death to life]”).

¹⁵⁷“Herzensstube” was a German rendering of the Latin term “prytaneum,” a building in ancient Greece where the “prytanis” (“presiding ruler”) resided; a sacred fire was kept continuously burning inside, and its hall contained the ruler’s “thronus” (“throne”). The writer of this hymn verse was apparently playing with a notion of the Christian sinner’s architecturally metaphorical “prytaneum” as a medically metaphorical “ventriculi cordis”—in German, the “Herzkammer” (“heart chamber”)—where Jesus would dwell. This is not to say that regular folk among Bach’s listeners needed or were expected to know any classical references to get the devotionally essential point of this poetry.

**Wohl kein schöner Fürstensaal,
Sondern eine finstre Grube;
Doch, sobald dein Gnadenstrahl
In demselben¹⁵⁵ nur wird blinken,
Wird es voller Sonnen dünken.¹⁵⁶**

**Certainly no beautiful princely hall,
[But] rather a dark [sin-filled] pit;¹⁵⁸
Yet, [Jesus,] as soon as your stream of grace
Will merely flicker within this same¹⁵⁹ [heart],
It [the heart]¹⁶⁰ will seem full of sun.**

6. Teil

Part 6

54. Herr, wenn die stolzen Feinde schnauben,
So gib, dass wir im festen Glauben

54. Lord, when the insolent¹⁶¹ enemies snort [like war
horses],¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵There is a great deal of confusion over the German wording of this line. Bach's own score, in the soprano part and alto part among his original performing parts (which are at this spot in Bach's handwriting), and in the contemporary hymnbooks, the second word reads "demselben," yielding either the sense "in this hall" or (more likely—see fn. 160, below), if the antecedent is taken to be the word "Herz" from the end of the previous hymn stanza (a stanza not included in the *Christmas Oratorio*, but whose word "Herz" does appear in line 2 of the previous movement), "in this heart." In the tenor part and bass part among Bach's original performing parts (which are at this spot likewise in Bach's handwriting) and in some modern editions, however, this reads "derselben," yielding either the sense "in this chamber" or "in this pit." But in the printed libretto booklets made available to Bach's fellow congregants and in some modern editions, this reads "denselben," yielding either the sense "into this hall" or "in these places [i.e., in some combination of the 'heart chamber,' 'unprincely hall,' 'dark pit,' and 'heart']." Some modern editions give "dieselbe," and "sie" for "es" in the next line, yielding either the sense "into this chamber" or "into this pit." With regard to the "es" in the final line, see also fn. 160, below.

¹⁵⁶A stanza of "Ihr Gestirn, ihr hohlen Lüfte."

¹⁵⁸The "Grube" ("pit") can be understood here in context as a "Herzgrube," which was defined as "eine kleine Höhle oder Grube in der Mitte des äussern Leibes gleich unter der Brust" ("a small cavity or pit in the middle of the outer [part of the] body just below the breast"). Note that in movement 45, the implied character interjects, "in meiner Brust, / Hier wohnt er" ("in my breast; / Here he [Jesus] dwells"). This pit in movement 53 is "dark" with *sin*. It is worth noting that "Dunkelheit" is a separate, more casual German term for simple physical darkness. "Finsternis," by contrast, is a more intense term, the one that would be employed to refer to concepts such as "the powers of darkness" ("die Mächte der Finsternis").

¹⁵⁹With regard to the German source word for "this same" being "demselben," "derselben," "denselben," or "dieselbe," see fn. 155, above.

¹⁶⁰Given that there are no nouns in this stanza whose gender is neuter, the "es" ("it") in this line most probably takes as its antecedent the "Herz" ("heart") of movement 52, the antecedent that might otherwise, or also, be understood from this hymn's previous stanza, "Komm, mein Herz, das soll zum besten, / So viel möglich, dich begästen" ("Come, my heart, which shall for the best, / As much as [it is] possible [to do so], host you [Jesus] as guest"). Alternatively, the "it" in the last line of movement 52 might simply be an example of what linguists call "dummy pronouns" (words functioning grammatically as pronouns, but which do not have antecedents like normal, referential pronouns do), and in this case the line would be conveying "It will seem bright in here," such that the "it" would be just like the one in the expression "Es regnet" ("It is raining").

¹⁶¹While "Stolz" primarily means "proud" in a more dignified sense, it is also an archaic synonym for "übermutig," in the sense of "insolent" or "cocky." In this way the word "Stolz" has the same double sense as the word "zed" in Hebrew, which means both "presumptuous" and "insolent." Movement 64 identifies the four (proud/insolent) "eschatological enemies" of humankind: death, devil, sin, and hell.

¹⁶²It is not on the face of it obvious what "schnauben" would mean here. Some of the ways that the word might be used included as a synonym for "schnarchen" ("to snore"), or for "schnaufen" ("to wheeze"), or for "schwer athem holen" ("to breathe heavily"), or for "spüren, suchen, spähen" ("to sense, seek, spy"), or for "zornig und feindlich sich gebahren" ("to behave angrily and hostilely"). In the Bach secondary literature it has been suggested that this line is quoting Psalm 56:3, "Meine Feinde schnauben täglich; denn viele streiten stolz wider mich" ("My enemies daily behave angrily and hostilely; for many [people] battle proudly against me"). But that particular wording of the Psalm, which is said to come from the early Luther Bibles, actually stems from the nineteenth century; the Luther Bibles of Bach's day and earlier gave "Meine Feinde versenken mich täglich; denn viel streiten wider mich stolziglich" ("My enemies daily plunge me into misery; for many [people] battle against me in a proud manner"). A plausible sense-giving biblical source for this use of "schnauben" linked with "enemies" in the *Christmas Oratorio*, however, is Luther's idiosyncratic rendering of Jeremiah 8:16, which says of an enemy approach, "man höret, dass ihre Rosse bereit schnauben zu Dan" ("[the sound,] that their horses are snorting is heard already in [the border city of] Dan [all the way inland, to Jerusalem]").

Nach deiner Macht und Hilfe sehn!
Wir wollen dir allein vertrauen,
So können wir den scharfen Klauen
Des Feindes unversehrt entgehn.

Then grant that we, in steadfast faith,
Might look to your power and salvation!
We will put our trust in you alone;
Thus can we escape
The enemy's sharp clutches unharmed.

55. *Da berief Herodes die Weisen heimlich und erlernt¹⁶³ mit Fleiss von ihnen, wenn der Stern erschienen wäre. Und weiset¹⁶⁴ sie gen Bethlehem und sprach: Ziehet hin und forschet fleissig nach dem Kindlein, und wenn ihrs findet, sagt mirs wieder,¹⁶⁵ dass ich auch komme und es anbetet.¹⁶⁶*

55. *Then Herod convened the wisemen secretly,¹⁶⁷ seeking to learn fully¹⁶⁸ from them, with diligence, when the star might have [first] appeared. And, directing them to Bethlehem, [he] declared: "Set out and search diligently for the little child, and when you find it, report this to me, so that I, too, may come and worship it."*

56. Du Falscher, suche nur den Herrn zu fällen,
Nimm alle falsche List,
Dem Heiland nachzustellen;
Der, dessen Kraft kein Mensch ermisst,

56. You deceitful one, [Herod,] just try to bring down [Jesus,] the Lord;
[Just go ahead and] use every [bit of] deceitful cunning
To lie in wait¹⁷⁰ for the savior;¹⁷¹

¹⁶³This verb is in historical-present tense, "erlernt" ("seeks to learn fully"); many Bibles gave it in past tense, "erlernte" ("sought to learn fully"). With regard to the senses of "erlernen," see fn. 168, below.

¹⁶⁴This verb is in historical-present tense, "weiset" ("directs"); many German Bibles gave it in past tense, "wies" ("directed").

¹⁶⁵In the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach's fellow congregants, this reads not "und wenn ihrs findet, sagt mirs wieder" ("and when you [do] find it [the child], report this to me") but "und wenn ihrs findet, so sagt mirs wieder" ("and if/when you [should] find it [the child], then report this to me"). In Bach's own score, the latter reading was revised to the former. Luther Bibles of Bach's day and earlier gave one or the other of these readings; e.g., the Calov commentary Bible, which Bach owned, gives the latter, whereas the Olearius commentary Bible, which Bach also owned, gives the former.

¹⁶⁶Matthew 2:7-8.

¹⁶⁷Luther, like other biblical commentators, suggested that King Herod wanted to keep all this secret, lest Jews might come to accept the birth of God's messiah-king and thus take occasion to revolt against the current regime.

¹⁶⁸"Erlernen," an uncommon usage, strictly speaking (as here) meant "völlig lernen" ("to fully/exactly learn"), and might be applied, e.g., to the proper learning of a language or a trade; otherwise, the word might be used simply as a synonym for "lernen" ("to learn"). "Erlernen" could also mean "to inquire fully," and so, to capture both senses, we have understood the word here to mean "to seek to learn fully."

¹⁷⁰In older German, "nachstellen" had a variety of meanings, including as a synonym for "auflauern" ("to lie in ambush for" or "to lay/lie in wait for"). Its use in Mark 6:19 is linguistically and narratively relevant to the *Christmas Oratorio*: "Herodias aber stellte ihm nach, und wollte ihn töten" ("But Herodias lay in wait for him [John the Baptist] and wanted to kill him"). Herodias was a granddaughter of Herod the Great (the Herod of the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke), and sister of Herod Agrippa I (the Herod of Acts 12). She was first married to her paternal half-uncle Herod (mistakenly called "Philip" in Mark 6:17 and in many manuscripts of Matthew 14:3), to whom she bore a daughter, identified by the first-century historian Josephus as "Salome" (not to be confused with the Salome of Mark 15-16, the Salome who was possibly the wife of Zebedee). Salome was the one who at Herodias's instigation asked her uncle and now step-father Herod Antipas (another half-uncle of Herodias and her second husband) for the head of John the Baptist as a reward for a special dance of Salome's that Antipas had enjoyed. Herodias lay in wait for John because he had publicly condemned her marriage to Antipas (she had abandoned her first husband, and Antipas had divorced his royal Nabatean wife). In all the potential confusion of names, the one clear thing is that there was a great deal of depravity among the Herodians, and the *Christmas Oratorio* librettist may have used the language of Mark 6 because of this: just like Herodias later lies in wait for John, so does Herod now lie in wait for God's messiah, Jesus.

¹⁷¹This movement is meditating ahead of time, as it were, on the passage in Matthew that comes right after the last part of that book that is explicitly narrated in the *Christmas Oratorio*, namely Matthew 2:12, in movement 60. In Matthew 2:13-16, "der Engel des HERREN" ("the angel of the LORD") appears to Joseph, the father of Jesus, in a dream and tells him to flee with Mary and Jesus to

Bleibt doch in sichrer Hand.¹⁶⁹
Dein Herz, dein falsches Herz ist schon,
Nebst aller seiner List, des Höchsten Sohn,
Den du zu stürzen suchst, sehr wohl bekannt.

He [the Lord Jesus] whose might no human comprehends,¹⁷²
Remains nonetheless in [God the Most High's]¹⁷³ sure hand.
Your heart, your deceitful heart,
Together with all its cunning, is already very well known
To the Most High's son, [God's messiah] whom you seek to
overthrow.

57. Nur ein Wink von seinen Händen
Stürzt ohnmächtiger Menschen Macht.
Hier wird alle Kraft verlacht!
Spricht der Höchste nur ein Wort,
Seiner Feinde Stolz zu enden,
O, so müssen sich sofort
Sterblicher Gedanken wenden.

57. Just one wave from his [the Most High's] hands
Overthrows the power of impotent humankind.
Here [with God] all [human] might is derided!
If the Most High declares just one word
To put a stop to the insolence¹⁷⁴ of his enemies,
Oh, then [their] mortal thoughts
Must turn immediately [to naught].¹⁷⁵

58. *Als sie nun den König gehöret hatten, zogen sie hin.
Und siehe, der Stern, den sie im Morgenlande gesehen
hatten, ging für ihnen hin, bis dass er kam und stund
oben über, da das Kindlein war. Da sie den Stern
sahen, wurden sie hoch erfreuet und gingen in das
Haus und funden das Kindlein mit Maria, seiner
Mutter, und fielen nieder und beteten es an und täten*

58. *Now when they had heard [Herod] the king, they set
out. And look: the star that they had seen in the Orient
went forth before them, until, having come [to
Bethlehem], it settled up above [the place] where the
little child was. When they saw the star, they became
exceedingly gladdened and went into the house¹⁷⁷ and
found the little child with Mary its mother, and bowed*

Egypt because Herod is aiming to murder the child portended to become king; Herod, duped by the wisemen, who do not come back to report to him, becomes furious and orders the killing of “alle Kinder” (“all the children”) in Bethlehem and its vicinity that were two years old and under. This narrative was meant to be understood as having been foreshadowed by the narrative of Exodus 1:22, where the Pharaoh in Egypt commands his people, “alle Söhne, die geboren werden, werft ins Wasser” (“throw into the water [of the Nile river] all sons that are born [to the Hebrews]”), but Pharaoh's daughter took pity on the Hebrew child Moses and raised him as her son.

¹⁶⁹The line reads “in sichern Stand” (“in [a] sure foothold”) in the printed librettos made available to Bach's fellow congregants. This may have been the librettist's original reading, as it seems to provide a better contrast with line 1's “fällen” (“bring down”). Whether the new version, “Bleibt doch in sichrer Hand” (“Remains nonetheless in [God the Most High's] sure hand”), was an intended revision or simply a copying mistake is unclear. A possible advantage of the new reading, however, is that it would identify the source of Jesus's security, despite his own humanly incomprehensible power, more clearly in God the father. See also the “hands” in line 1 of the next movement, and see also fn. 173, below.

¹⁷²“Ermessen” is employed here apparently not in its sense of “abmessen/ausmessen” (“to measure”) but in one of its older-German senses of “erfassen/begreifen” (“to grasp,” in the sense of “to conceive of” or “to comprehend”).

¹⁷³The reading of this line as found in Bach's materials seems to draw, in a sort of mirror image, on Luther's text for Psalm 77:11, “Ich muss das leiden; die rechte Hand des Höchsten kann alles ändern” (“[God's apparently forgetting to be merciful,] this [is something that] I have to suffer; the right hand of the Most High can change everything”); the meaning of the Hebrew text of this verse is now uncertain, and thus modern renderings differ significantly from one another.

¹⁷⁴With regard to “stolz” as “insolent,” see fn. 161, above.

¹⁷⁵“Sich wenden” here is an archaic synonym for “sich endigen” or “sich enden” (“to come/bring to an end,” “to cut short”). The sense of the last two lines here is derived from Psalm 33:10, “der HERR macht zu nicht der Heiden Rat, und wendet die Gedanken der Völker” (“The LORD brings the counsel of the heathen/gentiles to naught, and turns [to naught] the thoughts of the peoples”).

¹⁷⁷There is no mention of a “house” (or “wisemen”) in the infancy narrative of Luke, and there is no mention of a “manger” (or “shepherds”) in the narrative of Matthew. Those intent on harmonizing the narratives have either understood the wisemen to have visited a stable with a manger inside a building that is called an “inn” in Luke but a “house” in Matthew, or understood the wisemen to have visited a few days later than had the shepherds, when Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus would have been able to find better lodging than what had been available to them during the busy and crowded time at the start of a census.

*ihre Schätze auf und schenkten ihm Gold, Weihrauch und Myrrhen.*¹⁷⁶

down and worshiped it, and opened their treasures, presenting it gold, frankincense, and myrrh as gifts.

**59. Ich steh an deiner Krippen hier,
O Jesulein, mein Leben;
Ich komme, bring und schenke dir,
Was du mir hast gegeben.
Nimm hin, es ist mein Geist und Sinn,
Herz, Seel und Mut, nimm alles hin,
Und lass dirs wohlgefallen!**¹⁷⁸

**59. Here I stand at your manger,
Oh little Jesus, [you who are] my life;
To you I come, bringing and presenting as gifts
What [endowments] you have given me.
Accept [this], it is my spirit and inclination,
Heart, soul, and courage;¹⁷⁹ accept [this] all,
And let it please you greatly.**

*60. Und Gott befahl ihnen im Traum, dass sie sich nicht sollten wieder zu Herodes lenken, und zogen durch einen andern Weg wieder*¹⁸⁰ *in ihr Land.*¹⁸¹

60. And God commanded them in a dream that they should not direct themselves back to Herod, and [so they] set off by another path back to their country.

61. So geht! Genug, mein Schatz geht nicht von hier,
Er bleibet da bei mir;
Ich will ihn auch nicht von mir lassen.
Sein Arm wird mich aus Lieb
Mit sanftmutsvollem Trieb
Und grösster Zärtlichkeit umfassen;
Er soll mein Bräutigam verbleiben,
Ich will ihm Brust und Herz verschreiben.
Ich weiss gewiss, er liebet mich,
Mein Herz liebt ihn auch inniglich
Und wird ihn ewig ehren.
Was könnte mich nun für ein Feind
Bei solchem Glück versehren!
Du, Jesu, bist und bleibst mein Freund;
Und werd ich ängstlich zu dir flehn:

61. So go! Enough [that] my treasure [Jesus] is not taking his leave;
He is remaining here with me;
I also wish not to let him [free]¹⁸² from me.
His [saving] arm¹⁸³ will embrace me out of love
With tenderful¹⁸⁴ impulse
And greatest delicacy;¹⁸⁵
He shall permanently remain¹⁸⁶ my bridegroom;
Breast and heart I wish to commit to him.
I know for certain that he loves me;
My heart also loves him intimately
And will eternally honor him.
Now, with [my experiencing] such a good fortune,
What kind of enemy could [ever] harm me!
You, Jesus, are and remain my friend;

¹⁷⁶Matthew 2:9-11.

¹⁷⁸The first stanza of this hymn.

¹⁷⁹For their sense, lines 5–6 draw in part on the language of Hebrews 4:12, “Denn das Wort Gottes ist lebendig und kräftig und schärfer denn kein zweischneidig Schwert, und durchdringet, bis dass es scheidet Seele und Geist, ... und ist ein Richter der Gedanken und Sinne des Herzens” (“For the word of God is living and mighty, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and pierces until it separates soul and spirit ... and is a judge of the thoughts and inclinations of the heart”).

¹⁸⁰This second use of the word “wieder” (“back”) is lacking in the printed libretto booklet made available to Bach’s fellow congregants; the wording Bach used corresponds to the text in the contemporary Luther Bibles.

¹⁸¹Matthew 2:12.

¹⁸²Song of Songs 3:4, “Ich halte ihn, und will ihn nicht [los]lassen” (“I hold him [my beloved], and will not let him [loose/free]”).

¹⁸³The “arm” of Jesus is meant to be paralleled to the powerful saving “arm of God” that is continually spoken of in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Isaiah 59:16 and 63:5).

¹⁸⁴“Tenderful” is, to be sure, an *outré* word, but so is the source word, “sanftmutsvolle.”

¹⁸⁵In older German, “Zärtlichkeit” had a variety of now obsolete meanings, including as a synonym for “Zartheit” (“delicateness,” “delicacy”).

¹⁸⁶“Verbleiben” (here, “to permanently remain”) can be used as an intensified form of “bleiben” (“to remain”).

Herr, hilf!, so lass mich Hilfe sehn!

62. Nun mögt ihr stolzen Feinde schrecken;
Was könnt ihr mir für Furcht erwecken?
Mein Schatz, mein Hort ist hier bei mir!
Ihr mögt euch noch so grimmig stellen,
Droht nur, mich ganz und gar zu fällen,
Doch seht! mein Heiland wohnt hier.

63. Was will der Höllen Schrecken nun,
Was will uns Welt und Sünde tun,
Da wir in Jesu Händen ruhn!

**64. Nun seid ihr wohl gerochen
An eurer Feinde Schar,
Denn Christus hat zerbrochen,
Was euch zuwider war.
Tod, Teufel, Sünd und Hölle
Sind ganz und gar geschwächt;
Bei Gott hat seine Stelle
Das menschliche Geschlecht.**¹⁸⁸

And if I should anxiously plead unto you:
“Lord, save [me]!,” then let me see salvation.

62. [Well] now, you insolent¹⁸⁷ enemies do like to horrify;
[Yet] what kind of fear could you arouse in me?
My treasure, [Jesus,] my refuge is here with me!
You do like to act oh so fierce;
Just [go ahead and] threaten to bring me down well and truly;
But look! My savior dwells here [in my heart].

63. What, now, will hell’s horror want [to do to us Christians];
What will [the] world and sin want to do to us,
Now that we rest in Jesus’s hands!

**64. Now you [God’s chosen Christians]¹⁸⁹ are well avenged
Of your band of enemies,
For Christ has shattered
What was against you.
Death, devil, sin, and hell
Are well and truly diminished;
The human family¹⁹⁰
Has its place with God [in eternity].**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



Scan or go to <http://www.BachCantataTexts.org/BWV248.2> for an annotated translation

¹⁸⁷With regard to “stolz” as “insolent,” see fn. 161, above.

¹⁸⁸A stanza of “Ihr Christen auserkoren.”

¹⁸⁹This is the subject of the hymn text, “Ihr Christen auserkoren” (“You Christians Chosen [by God]”).

¹⁹⁰It may seem that “Das menschliche Geschlecht” ought simply to be rendered “the human race,” but this does not capture the religious and other nuances of the German in this context. The leading eighteenth-century German dictionary offers a definition of “Geschlecht” as “die von einem gemeinschaftlichen Stammvater entsprossenen Personen selbst, als ein Ganzes betrachtet, in Concreto; eine Familie. Das menschliche Geschlecht, alle Menschen, so fern sie von Adam, ihrem gemeinschaftlichen Stammvater, abstammen” (“the persons themselves sprung up from a common forefather, considered as a whole, in concrete terms; a family. The human race/lineage, all human beings, insofar as they are descended from Adam, their common forefather”).