

Advent in the Company of JS Bach  
Cantata BWV 36  
Schwingt freudig euch empor

### Readings for Advent 1

- The Scripture Lessons for the First Sunday in Advent
- The designated scripture lessons for Advent 1, the first Sunday of the liturgical year, are Romans 13:11-14 (the epistle) and Matthew 21:1-9 (the Gospel).
- These texts illustrate the theological complexity of the incarnation and the ways in which Christ “comes” to his people.

### Cantata BWV 36

- Johann Sebastian Bach composed the church cantata Schwingt freudig euch empor BWV 36, in **Leipzig** in 1731 for the first Sunday in Advent.
- In a unique structure in Bach's cantatas, he interpolated four movements derived from the former works with four stanzas from two important Advent hymns, to add liturgical focus, three from Luther's "*Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*" and one from Nicolai's "*Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*".
- He first performed the cantata in its final form of two parts, eight movements, on 2 December **1731**.
- Bach based parts of the music on a homage cantata of the same name, *Schwingt freudig euch empor*, BWV 36.1, which he had composed for the birthday of a Leipzig University teacher and first performed in spring **1725**.
- The text was probably written by Picander, who modified it to a congratulatory cantata for Countess Charlotte Friederike Wilhelmine of Anhalt-Köthen, *Steigt freudig in die Luft*, BWV 36.2, first performed on 30 November **1726**.
- Another version was a congratulatory cantata for a Johannes Florens Rivinius, a university professor in Leipzig, *Die Freude reget sich*, BWV 36.3, probably in **1735**.
- Finally in 1731, Bach reworked the cantata considerably and wrote a new score. He interpolated the arias not with recitatives, but with three stanzas from Luther's hymn for Advent, "*Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*". This main hymn for the first Sunday in Advent had already opened his cantata for the same occasion in 1714, *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland*, BWV 61.
- The hymn stanzas "serve to anchor the cantata to some extent in the Advent story, and to give it liturgical purpose and a clear focus".
- John Eliot Gardiner terms it "structurally unusual". Bach divided the cantata in two parts to be performed **before and after the sermon**, closing part I with a stanza from Nicolai's hymn.
- The librettist of this adaptation, who stayed close to the secular cantata without reference to the readings, is unknown.
- Klaus Hofmann notes that the jubilant opening matches the Gospel of the entry into Jerusalem "with the people's jubilant shouts of Hosanna".
- The date of the adaptation is not certain, because the version is extant only in a copy by Bach's student Christoph Nichelmann.
- Many fine details of the music were improved by Bach for this version.

### St Thomas Church, Leipzig

Eisenach (1685-1695)  
Ohrdruf (1695-1700)  
Lüneburg (1700-1703)  
Arnstadt (1703-1707)  
Mühlhausen (1707-1708)  
Weimar (1708-1717)  
Cöthen (1717-1723)  
Leipzig (1723-1750)



## Schwingt freudig euch empor

Movements of *Schwingt freudig euch empor, Part 1, BWV 36*

No.	Title	Type	Vocal	Winds	Strings	Key	Time
1	<i>Schwingt freudig euch empor</i>	Chorus	SATB	2ObDa	2VI Va Bc	D major	3/4
2	<i>Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland</i>	Choral	Soprano, alto	1ObDa (col Soprano), 1 ObDa (coll'Alto)	Bc	F# minor	C
3	<i>Die Liebe zieht mit sanften Schritten</i>	Aria	Tenor	1ObDa (solo)	Bc	B minor	3/8
4	<i>Zwingt die Saiten in Cythara</i>	Chorale	SATB	1ObDa (col Soprano), 1ObDa (coll'Alto)	1VI (col Soprano), 1VI (coll'Alto), Va (col Tenore), Bc	D major	C

Movements of *Schwingt freudig euch empor, Part 2, BWV 36*

No.	Title	Type	Vocal	Winds	Strings	Key	Time
5	<i>Willkommen, werter Schatz!</i>	Aria	Bass		2VI, Va, Bc	D major	C
6	<i>Der du bist dem Vater gleich</i>	Choral	Tenor	2ObDa	Bc	B minor	3/4
7	<i>Auch mit gedämpften, schwachen Stimmen</i>	Aria	Soprano		1VI (muted), Bc	G major	12/8
8	<i>Lob sei Gott dem Vater ton</i>	Chorale	SATB	1ObDa (col Soprano), 1ObDa (coll'Alto)	1VI (col Soprano), 1VI (coll'Alto), Va (col Tenore), Bc	B minor	C

## Performance

Bach Cantatas pilgrimage  
John Eliot Gardiner

On Christmas Day 1999 a unique celebration of the new Millennium began in the Herderkirche in Weimar, Germany: the Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists under the direction of Sir John Eliot Gardiner set out to perform all of Johann Sebastian Bach's surviving church cantatas in the course of the year 2000, the 250th anniversary of Bach's death. The cantatas were performed on the liturgical feasts for which they were composed, in a year-long musical pilgrimage encompassing some of the most beautiful

churches throughout Europe (including many where Bach himself performed) and culminating in three concerts in New York over the Christmas festivities at the end of the millennial year.

**Schwingt freudig euch empor zu den erhabnen Sternen,**  
*Soar joyfully you upwards to the lofty stars,*  
**Ihr Zungen, die ihr itzt in Zion fröhlich seid!**  
*you tongues, you who now in Zion are cheerful!*  
**Doch haltet ein! Der Schall darf sich nicht weit entfernen,**  
*Though stop! The sound may not have to go far away,*  
**Es naht sich selbst zu euch der Herr der Herrlichkeit.**  
*He himself comes near to you, the Lord of Glory*

- 1. Coro
- Oboe d'amore I/II all' unisono, Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo
- The opening chorus is opened by a ritornello, dominated by two contrasting motifs: the strings play a short rising figure in triplets, the oboes d'amore play an expansive melody.
- The movement is in two similar parts, each consisting of two contrasting sections, "*Schwingt freudig euch empor zu den erhabnen Sternen*" and "*Doch haltet ein!*".
- The **bass** voice, the lowest register, enters first, followed by the **tenors**, **altos**, and **sopranos**. This ascending sequence also reflects the text: "soaring aloft", literally "swinging upward".
- John Eliot Gardiner calls it a "spiritual madrigal".

**Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland,**  
*Now come, saviour of the gentiles,*  
**Der Jungfrauen Kind erkannt,**  
*Known as child of the virgin;*  
**Des sich wundert alle Welt,**  
*Of this, all the world marvels:*  
**Gott solch Geburt ihm bestellt.**  
*God ordained him such a birth.*

- 2. Choral (Duetto) S A
- Oboe d'amore I col Soprano, Oboe d'amore II coll' Alto, Continuo
- A duet for soprano and alto for the first stanza, fervent and intimate. Notice the use of the hymn melody in all three strands of the music.
- Sequence: **ten** bars (twice), then **eleven** bars and finally, there are **sixteen** measures for the final "*Gott solch Geburt ihm bestellt*".
- NB especially the leaps of sixths on the urgent request "*nun komm*",
- NB the syncopated rhythm on "*des sich wundert alle Welt*".
- NB daring chromaticism, in the voices, on the final line, "*Gott solch Geburt ihm bestellt*".

**Die Liebe zieht mit sanften Schritten**  
*Love draws with soft steps*  
**Sein Treugeliebtes allgemach.**  
*[God's] true loved ones gradually.*  
**Gleichwie es eine Braut entzückt,**  
*Even as the spouse is delighted,*  
**Wenn sie den Bräutigam erblicket,**  
*when she sees the bridegroom*  
**So folgt ein Herz auch Jesu nach.**  
*so follows a heart likewise after Jesu.*

- 3. Aria T
- Oboe d'amore solo, Continuo
- The tenor aria reflects "*Die Liebe zieht mit sanften Schritten*" with oboe d'amore as obbligato instrument, "the traditional musical symbol of love".

- A gentle, triple time aria, in ABA form, with much emphasis on the “all” of *allgemach*.
- It uses the metaphor of Jesus as the bridegroom and the Soul as the bride.
- Word painting on “*folgt*”.
- It connects well with the Gospel of the entry into Jerusalem.
- “*Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*” is a Lutheran hymn by Philipp Nicolai written in 1597 and first published in 1599.
- It inspired musical settings through centuries, notably Bach's chorale cantata *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*, BWV 1.
- Bach uses verse 6 for this cantata.

### **Zwingt die Saiten in Cythara**

*Compel the strings in Cythera*

**Und lasst die süße Musica**

*and let the sweet music*

**Ganz freudenreich erschallen,**

*full joyously resound,*

**Dass ich möge mit Jesulein,**

*that I desire with little Jesus,*

**Dem wunderschönen Bräutigam mein,**

*my wondrous beautiful bridegroom*

**In steter Liebe wallen!**

*in constant love to simmer!*

**Singet, Springet,**

*Sing, spring,*

**Jubilieret, triumphieret, dankt dem Herren!**

*rejoice, triumph, thank the LORD!*

**Groß ist der König der Ehren.**

*Great is the King of glory*

- 4. Choral
- Oboe d'amore I e Violino I col Soprano, Oboe d'amore II e Violino II coll' Alto, Viola col Tenore, Continuo
- Cythara: a wide group of stringed instruments of medieval and Renaissance Europe, including not only the lyre and harp but also necked, string instruments.
- The instruments double the voice.
- The bridegroom theme is resumed.
- Nicolai's hymn that closes part I in a "rousing four-part harmonisation" (John Eliot Gardiner).

### **Willkommen, werter Schatz!**

*Welcome, worthy Treasure!*

**Die Lieb und Glaube machet Platz**

*Love and faith make a place*

**Vor dich in meinem Herzen rein,**

*for You in my pure heart,*

**Zieh bei mir ein!**

*move in with me!*

- 5. Aria B
- Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo
- The very spirited bass aria beginning part II, “Willkommen, werter Schatz!”, shows “echoes of the first movement”.
- The “welcome” motif is especially suitable for Advent.
- The aria avoids a regular *da capo* structure.
- While we might have anticipated a soprano aria, instead the bass voice addresses the bride.
- NB: repetition of “*Ziehen bei mir ein*”.

**Der du bist dem Vater gleich,**  
*You Who are equal to the Father,*  
**Führ hinaus den Sieg im Fleisch,**  
*hence put into effect triumph in the flesh,*  
**Dass dein ewig Gott's gewalt**  
*so that Your eternal divine Power*  
**In uns das krank Fleisch enthält.**  
*in us the sick flesh be included.*

- 6. Choral T
- Oboe d'amore I/II, Continuo
- The next hymn stanza, "*Der du bist dem Vater gleich*", the sixth stanza from Luther's hymn "dealing with the sins of the flesh and Christ's mission to redeem humankind", is marked "molt' allegro".
- The tenors sing the chorale melody unadorned as a *cantus firmus*, in long notes, representing the human condition. The oboes represent the work of salvation, achieved by Christ.
- The oboes d'amore play with "the urgent surging of semi-quaver activity". The dialogue of the two oboes makes for a very lively accompaniment.

#### **Auch mit gedämpften, schwachen Stimmen**

*Also with subdued, faint voices*  
**Wird Gottes Majestät verehrt.**  
*becomes the majesty of God honoured.*  
**Denn schallet nur der Geist darbei,**  
*Because only the Spirit sounds thereby,*  
**So ist ihm solches ein Geschrei,**  
*so is to Him such a cry,*  
**Das er im Himmel selber hört.**  
*that He himself in heaven hears.*

- 7. Aria S
- Violino solo con sordino, Continuo
- The text "*Auch mit gedämpften, schwachen Stimmen*" is illustrated by a muted (*con sordino*) solo violin. Structure ABA\*. John Eliot Gardiner describes this movement as a *berceuse* (a lullaby). The contrast with the previous choral is quite stark.
- An alluring 12/8 rhythm creates a picture of considerable enchantment and tender lyricism.
- NB; confident lyricism and playful interweaving of violin and voice. Some delightful word painting on "*schallet*" when it comes to "*Denn schallet nur der Geist darbei*".
- Towards the end, Bach can hardly bear to let of the beautiful tune, in a long coda.

**Lob sei Gott, dem Vater, g'ton,**  
*Praised be God the Father toned,*  
**Lob sei Gott, sein'm eingen Sohn,**  
*Praised be God, God's only Son,*  
**Lob sei Gott, dem Heiligen Geist,**  
*Praised be God, the Holy Ghost,*  
**Immer und in Ewigkeit!**  
*all ways and in Eternity!*

- 8. Choral
- Oboe d'amore I e Violino I col Soprano, Oboe d'amore II e Violino II coll' Alto, Viola col Tenore, Continuo
- The closing choral, the final stanza of Luther's hymn, "*Lob sei Gott dem Vater ton*" is a straight four-part setting.
- John Eliot Gardiner: a sturdy proclamation of public praise.