

ADVENT IN THE COMPANY OF JS BACH
 Cantata BWV 132
 Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn

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Readings for Advent 4

- The Scripture Lessons for the Fourth Sunday in Advent
- The prescribed readings for the Sunday were from the Epistle to the Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord alway" (Philippians 4:4-7), and from the Gospel of John, the testimony of John the Baptist (John 1:19-28).

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (**Philippians 4:4-7**)

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "**Who are you?**" He confessed and did not deny it, but he confessed, "I am not the Messiah." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." Then they said to him, "**Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?**" He said, "**I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'**" as the prophet Isaiah said.

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, "Why, then, are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" John answered them, "I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal." This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising. (**John 1:19-28**)

Cantata 132

- Johann Sebastian Bach composed the church cantata *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn* (Prepare the paths, prepare the road), BWV 132, in Weimar in 1715 for the fourth Sunday of Advent
- Bach led the first performance on 22 December 1715.
- Bach could not revive the work in Leipzig, because in Leipzig Advent was a "*tempus clausum*".
- The cantata text was written by the court poet Salomon Franck, published in the collection *Evangelisches Andachts-Opffer* in 1715.
- He included the fifth stanza of Elisabeth Cruciger hymn "*Herr Christ, der einig Gotts Sohn*" (1524).
- Franck paraphrases in the first aria the passage from the Isaiah 40 which is quoted in the prescribed gospel, "*Bereitet dem Herrn den Weg*" (Prepare the path for the Lord, Isaiah 40:3-4).
- Franck also refers to the baptism as a way of preparation. The individual Christian is addressed as a limb/member of Christ.
- Bach structured the cantata in six movements, alternating arias and recitatives, concluded by a chorale.

- As in several other cantatas on words by Franck, it is scored for a small ensemble of four vocal soloists – soprano (S), alto (A), tenor (T) and bass (B) – and a Baroque instrumental ensemble of oboe (Ob), two violins (Vl), viola (Va), cello (Vc) and basso continuo (Bc) including bassoon.[
- A choir is only needed for the chorale, if at all.
- The duration is given as 22 minutes.
- The music of the closing chorale is lost.
- Possibly, it may have been noted in a simple setting on a separate sheet, as in the similar case of *Nur jedem das Seine*, BWV 163, composed four weeks earlier.
- For practical purposes the same verse, closing *Ihr, die ihr euch von Christo nennet*, BWV 164, in 1725, may be used.

Bach in Weimar

- A better salary and more musical elbow room - these were the ambitions of the young Bach after barely a year as the organist at Blasiuskirche, in Mühlhausen.
- He had taken up the position there because of the express requirements for an organist who was good at vocal composition.
- But in practice, the opportunities turned out to be disappointing.
- Things took a turn for the better in mid-1708, however, when Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Weimar invited Bach to come and inspect the renovated organ in his court chapel.
- The elderly court organist there fell ill, so Bach was able to perform the inauguration recital in his place.
- The recital was so successful that he was immediately offered the double post of court organist and chamber musician.
- Here, he could work with professional musicians for the first time, which was important to Bach, as his ultimate goal was to provide ‘well-organised church music’,
- For this ‘well-organised church music, of course, Bach wanted to compose *all* the music himself.
- It was not until 1714 that Bach was promoted to Konzertmeister and could start to make his vocal dreams come true.
- He then decided, however, to launch straight into compositional innovations.
- The emphasis shifted from formal settings of biblical texts to recitatives and da capo arias, written to new lyrics and supplemented only incidentally with a chorale.

Movements of *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn* BWV 132

No.	Title	Text	Type	Vocal	Winds	Strings	Key	Time
1	<i>Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn</i>	Franck	Aria	S	Ob	2VI Va	A major	6/8
2	<i>Willst du dich Gottes Kind und Christi Bruder nennen</i>	Franck	Recitative	T				C
3	<i>Wer bist du? Frage dein Gewissen</i>	Franck	Aria	B		Vc	E major	C
4	<i>Ich will, mein Gott, dir frei heraus bekennen</i>	Franck	Recitative	A		2VI Va		C
5	<i>Christi Glieder, ach bedenket</i>	Franck	Aria	A		VI solo	B minor	C
6	<i>Ertöt uns durch deine Güte</i>	Cruziger	Chorale	SATB	music lost			C

- Suppliers of this new poetry included **Salomo Franck**, chief librarian in Weimar.
- He published his anthology *Evangelisches Andachts-Opffer* in 1715.
- Bach set music to many of his poems hot off the press.
- He used no fewer than ten of them in the year they were published, including our cantata, *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn*.
- Three arias are alternated with two recitatives, and the work finishes off with a chorale. There are festive arias for the soprano, the alto and the bass, with a starring role for a different instrument each time.
- The **oboe** presents itself in the long opening soprano aria and the ultra-short closing chorale.
- Bach gives the **cello** an obligato passage in the bass aria.
- The alto is surrounded by dazzling notes from the **violin**.
- Both the vocal and the instrumental parts are very demanding and give an indication of the standard of the musicians with whom Bach could work in Weimar.

The Performance

The Sacred Cantatas

Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Alice Harnoncourt co-founded the Concentus Musicus Wien (CMW) in 1953, along with several musicians from the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. The CMW did research and rehearsal for 4 years before their first official concert; although the ensemble made its 'unofficial' debut at the Konzerthaus, Vienna in 1954 with a production of Claudio Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, the CMW's first public concert was in May 1957 at the Schwarzenberg Palace in Vienna.

Cantata 132, *Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn*

Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn!

Prepare the ways, prepare the path!

Bereitet die Wege
Prepare the ways
Und machet die Stege
and make the footpaths
Im Glauben und Leben
in faith and in life
Dem Höchsten ganz eben,
smooth before the Highest.
Messias kömmt an!
The Messiah is coming!

- 1. Aria S
- Oboe, Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo
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- "Bereitet die Wege, bereitet die Bahn!" is in da capo form in a lilting 6/8 time signature.
- The soprano renders her calls to prepare the ways in melismas of several measures of semiquavers – very challenging!
- John Eliot Gardiner describes the character of the movement of "insouciant grace and fleet-footed buoyancy befitting a slowish gigue or a French *loure*."

- The solo oboe adds virtuoso figuration and trills, recalling Bach's secular music.
- In the second part, the music becomes more earnest, only to land on the joyful last line.
- The aria is concluded by rejoicing calls: "Messias kömmt an" (The Messiah is coming!) – left unaccompanied.

Willst du dich Gottes Kind und Christi Bruder nennen,
If you want to be called God's child and Christ's brother,
So müssen Herz und Mund den Heiland frei bekennen.
then your heart and your mouth must freely acknowledge the saviour.
Ja, Mensch, dein ganzes Leben
Indeed, Man, your whole life
Muss von dem Glauben Zeugnis geben!
must bear witness to your faith!
Soll Christi Wort und Lehre
If Christ's words and teaching
Auch durch dein Blut versiegelt sein,
have to be sealed with your blood,
So gib dich willig drein!
give yourself up to this willingly!

- 2. Recitativo T
- Continuo
- The tenor recitative, "Willst du dich Gottes Kind und Christi Bruder nennen", contains **extended arioso passages**, to stress "der Christen Kron und Ehre" (the Christians' crown and glory) and "Wälz ab die schweren Sündensteine" (roll away the heavy stones of sin).
- The voice and the continuo are at times set in *imitation or canon*, an image for the Nachfolge (following), as they go together to express the unity achieved, on the words "daß er mit dir im Glauben sich vereine" (so that He may unite Himself to you in faith).

Wer bist du? Frage dein Gewissen,
Who are you? Ask your conscience,
Da wirst du sonder Heuchelei,
then without hypocrisy
Ob du, o Mensch, falsch oder treu,
whether you, O Man, are false or true
Dein rechtes Urteil hören müssen.
you must hear the right judgement about yourself.

Wer bist du? Frage das Gesetze,
Who are you? Ask the law,
Das wird dir sagen, wer du bist,
that will tell you who you are,

Ein Kind des Zorns in Satans Netze.
a child of wrath in Satan's snares,
Ein falsch und heuchlerischer Christ.
A false and hypocritical Christian.

- 3. Aria B
- Violoncello, Continuo
- In the bass aria, "Wer bist du? Frage dein Gewissen" (Who are you? Ask your conscience), the question "Wer bist du?" (Who are you?), posed by the priests to St. John in the gospel, is given to the bass as the *vox Christi*, as if Jesus asked the listener this question.

- The tormenting question "Wer bist du?" is given to the bass, accompanied only by a *continuo that covers nothing, glosses over nothing, and is filled with pitilessly unyielding, stubbornly returning motives.*
- The cello often plays a "concertante role".
- Its first motif expresses the question and is repeated throughout the movement, and the vocal line is derived from it.
- There are spectacular chromatic melismata on the last line – the abandonment of a key suggesting the chaos of the false life.

Ich will, mein Gott, dir frei heraus bekennen,
I shall freely and openly acknowledge to you, my God,
Ich habe dich bisher nicht recht bekannt.
that up to now I have not rightly acknowledged you.
Ob Mund und Lippen gleich dich Herrn und Vater nennen,
Though my mouth and lips call you Lord and Father,
Hat sich mein Herz doch von dir abgewandt.
yet my heart has been turned away from you.
Ich habe dich verleugnet mit dem Leben!
I have denied you with my life!
Wie kannst du mir ein gutes Zeugnis geben?
How can you give good testimony about me?
Als, Jesu, mich dein Geist und Wasserbad
When, Jesus your spirit and the water of baptism
Gereiniget von meiner Missetat,
purified me from my misdeeds
Hab ich dir zwar stets feste Treu versprochen;
I did indeed promise steadfast faithfulness to you;
Ach! aber ach! der Taufbund ist gebrochen.
Ah ! Alas! The covenant of baptism is broken.
Die Untreu reuet mich!
I repent my unfaithfulness!
Ach Gott, erbarme dich,
Ah, God, have mercy on me
Ach hilf, dass ich mit unverwandter Treue
Ah, help me, so that with immutable faithfulness
Den Gnadenbund im Glauben stets erneue!
I may constantly renew the covenant of grace by my faith!

- 4. Recitativo A
- Violino I/II, Viola, Continuo
- The expressive declamation of the alto recitative, "*Ich will, mein Gott, dir frei heraus bekennen*" is highlighted by chords in the strings.

Christi Glieder, ach bedenket,
Members of Christ, ah, consider
Was der Heiland euch geschenket
what the saviour has bestowed on you
Durch der Taufe reines Bad!
Through the pure bath of baptism!
Bei der Blut- und Wasserquelle
From this fountain of blood and water
Werden eure Kleider helle,

your garments become bright
Die befleckt von Missetat.
that were stained by your sins.
Christus gab zum neuen Kleide
Christ gave you new clothes
Roten Purpur, weiße Seide,
scarlet purple, white silk.
Diese sind der Christen Staat.
These are the finery of a Christian.

- 5. Aria A
- Violino solo, Continuo
- A solo violin accents the alto aria, "Christi Glieder, ach bedenket", possibly inspired by the words "Christus gab zum neuen Kleide roten Purpur, weiße Seide"
- The form is ritornello, with a very elaborate violin obligato.
- Gardiner interprets it as "the cleansing effect of baptismal water".
- The musicologist Julian Mincham supports that, stating: "Bach seldom neglects opportunities of creating musical images of cleansing water when mention is made of the act of baptism. This is the starting point of his invention of the violin obbligato melody".
- Bach himself may have played the violin part.
- Once again, Bach is slow to give up the lovely violin part...

Ertöt uns durch deine Güte;
Kill us through your kindness;
Erweck uns durch deine Gnad;
awaken us through your grace;
Den alten Menschen kränke,
weaken the old man
Dass der neu' leben mag
so that the new man may live
Wohl hie auf dieser Erden,
even here on this earth
Den Sinn und Begehrden
with his mind and his desires
Und G'danken habn zu dir.
and thoughts all on you.

- 6. Choral
- The music does not survive.
- The four-part setting of the closing chorale, "Ertöt uns durch deine Güte" is lost, but can be taken from *Ihr, die ihr euch von Christo nennet*, BWV 164, transposed to A major.

Netherlands Bach Society: cantata 132