

BWV 119 "Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn"

Cantata for the Installation of the Town Council, first performed on August 30, 1723

1. Chorus

*Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn, lobe, Zion, deinen Gut!
Denn er machet fest die Riegel deiner Tore und segnet
deine Kinder drinnen, er schaffet deinen Grenzen Frieden.
(Psalm 147:12-14)*

2. Rezitativ T

Gesegnet Land, glückselge Stadt,
Woselbst der Herr sein Herd und Feuer hat!
Wie kann Gott besser lohnen,
Als wo er Ehre läßt in einem Lande wohnen?
Wie kann er eine Stadt
Mit reicherm Nachdruck segnen,
Als wo er Güt und Treu einander läßt begegnen,
Wo er Gerechtigkeit und Friede
Zu küssen niemals müde,
Nicht müde, niemals satt
Zu werden teur verheißen, auch in der Tat erfüllet hat?
Da ist der Schluß gemacht: gesegnet Land, glückselge
Stadt!

3. Arie T

Wohl dir, du Volk der Linden,
Wohl dir, du hast es gut!
Wieviel an Gottes Segen
Und seiner Huld gelegen,
Die überschwenglich tut,
Kannst du an dir befinden.

4. Rezitativ B

So herrlich stehst du, liebe Stadt!
Du Volk, das Gott zum Erbteil sich erwählet hat!
Doch wohl! und aber wohl! wo man's zu Herzen fassen
Und recht erkennen will,
Durch wen den Herr den Segen wachsen lassen.
Ja!
Was bedarf es viel?
Das Zeugnis ist schon da,
Herz und Bewissen wird uns überzeugen,
Daß, was wir Gutes bei uns sehn,
Nächst Gott durch kluge Obrigkeit
Und durch ihr weises Regiment geschehn.
Drum sei, geliebtes Volk, zu treuem Dank bereit,
Sonst würden auch davon nicht deine Mauern
schweigen!

1. Chorus

*Praise the Lord, Jerusalem, praise your God, O Zion. For He
hath strengthened the bars of your gates, He hath blessed thy
children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders.
(Psalm 147:12-13, KJV)*

2. Recitative T

Blessed land, fortunate city,
where the Lord Himself keeps hearth and fire!
How better can God offer reward
than to let glory dwell in a land?
How can he bless a city
with more bounteous favor
than by letting goodness and loyalty mingle,
by letting righteousness and peace
kiss each other,
never weary, never satisfied
until the precious promises are also fulfilled in deed?
This is the conclusion: blessed land, fortunate city!
*(Psalm 85:10 Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness
and peace have kissed each other.)*

3. Aria T

Hail to you, people of the lindens,
Hail to you, all is well with you!
How much of God's blessing
and his graciousness,
filled to overflowing,
can you discover within yourselves?

4. Recitative B

How gloriously you stand, dear city!
You people, whom God has chosen for his inheritance!
It is good! It is very good! when one takes to heart and rightly
recognizes that it is the Lord
Through whom this blessing flows.
Yes!
What more is needed?
The testimony is already there,
heart and conscience convince us,
that whatever goodness we see among us
comes—next to God—through prudent government
and through its wise governance.
Therefore be prepared, dear people, for true thanks:
Otherwise not even your city walls will be silent!

5. Arie A

Die Obrigkeit ist Gottes Gabe,
Ja selber Gottes Ebenbild.

Wer ihre Macht nicht will ermessen,
Der muß auch Gottes gar vergessen:
Wie würde sonst sein Wort erfüllt?

6. Rezitativ S

Nun! Wir erkennen es und bringen dir,
O höchster Gott, ein Opfer unsers Danks dafür.
Zumal, nachdem der heutige Tage,
Der Tag, den uns der Herr gemacht,
Euch, teure Väter, teils von eurer Last entbunden,
Teils auch auf euch
Schlaflose Sorgenstunden
Bei einer neuen Wahl gebracht,
So seufzt ein treues Volk mit Herz und Mund zugleich:

7. Chorus

Der Herr hat Guts an uns getan,
Des sind wir alle fröhlich.
Er seh die teuren Väter an
Und halte auf unzählig
Und späte lange Jahre naus
In ihrem Regimente Haus,
So wollen wir ihn preisen.

8. Rezitativ A

Zuletzt!
Da du uns, Herr, zu deinem Volk gesetzt,
So laß von deinen Frommen
Nur noch ein arm Gebet vor deiner Ohren kommen
Und höre! ja erhöre!
Der Mund, das Herz und Seele seufzet sehre.

9. Choral

**Hilf deinem Volk, Herr Jesu Christ,
Und segne, was dein Erbteil ist.**

**Wart und pfleg ihr' zu aller Zeit
Und heb sie hoch in Ewigkeit!**

Amen.

From the "German Te Deum," Martin Luther 1529

Composite translation

5. Aria A

Authority is God's gift,
indeed, it is even the very image of God.

Whoever would not reckon its might
would also be oblivious to God:
How else would His word be fulfilled?

6. Recitative S

Now! we acknowledge (all this) and bring to You,
o highest God, an offering of our thanks for this.
Especially after this day,
the day which the Lord has made for us.
You, dear Fathers, one part of you relieved of your burdens,
While another part of you have brought upon yourselves
sleepless hours of worry
as a result of this new election.
So sigh a faithful people with heart and mouth together:

7. Chorus

The Lord has done good things for us,
For this we all rejoice.
He gazes upon our faithful Town fathers,
and supports them through immeasurable
and long-lasting years
in their house of government.
Therefore we praise Him.

(Psalm 126:3 The Lord has done good things for us; we are glad)

8. Recitative A

At last!
Since You, Lord, did make us your people,
then grant that, from Your devout ones
even a poor prayer may reach Your ears,
and hear it! indeed, grant it!
The deep sighs of our mouths, our hearts and souls.

9. Chorale

**Help your people, Lord Jesus Christ,
and bless your inheritance.**

**Look after and care for them at all times
and raise them high in eternity!**

Amen.

Conductor's notes

BWV 119 *Preise, Jerusalem, den Herrn (Praise the Lord, Jerusalem)* was the first of the five extant cantatas that Bach wrote for the annual ceremony for the installation of the Leipzig Town Council. Leipzig's governance included three civic groups, each consisting of a mayor or deputy mayor and 10 councilors. The groups rotated every year, each governing from one St. Bartholomew's Day (August 24) to the next. The installation ceremony, also called the "rotation," was always held on the first Monday after St. Bartholomew's Day in the St. Nicholas church.

1. The opening chorus, scored for trumpets, recorders, oboes, and strings, employs a French overture prelude and postlude to frame balanced phrases of Psalm 147:12–14 (*Praise the Lord, Jerusalem, praise your God, o Zion/For He has strengthened the bars of your gates,/He has blessed your children,/He has made peace at your borders.*) Within the mostly polyphonic texture of the vocal section, each phrase leads to a cadence with a *hemiola* (duple sub-beat) in the voices and upper instruments and the on-going triple sub-beats of the continuo. Introducing the central phrase, *He has blessed your children*, a brief orchestral interlude overlaps the only vocal homophony of the cantata.

4/4 Prelude	12/8 Line 1	Line 2	(Interlude) / Line 3	Line 4	Line 1	4/4 Postlude
Frame	A	B	(A) / C	B	A	Frame

2. The tenor recitative clarifies that Jerusalem is the city of Leipzig. The anonymous librettist stitches together several paraphrases from Psalm 85, including verse 10 (*Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other*) to sing the praises of Leipzig and its people.
3. The tenor aria, scored for two oboes da caccia and continuo, praises Leipzig as the city of linden trees (and in fact, the name "Leipzig" is derived from *urbs libzi*, place of lindens). The lilting motif moves canonically in oboes, which come together for each cadence. The tenor extends the motif into long graceful phrases, emphasizing God's "blessing" with a long held note and "people" with a long run of triplets, assuring the faithful that God's blessing is local.

Bach's notation of this aria illustrates a problem of contemporary performance practice. The dotted eighth-sixteenth pattern of the motif is always interpreted in an eighth-sixteenth triplet pattern, but the eighth rest-eighth note pattern that begins the motif can be interpreted either as part of the same triplet pattern (e.g. Helmuth Rilling) or strictly as written (e.g. Philippe Herreweghe). The latter interpretation sets up three-against-two patterns that occur throughout the movement, never allowing the listener to fully relax into the lilt.

4. The bass recitative brings back the festive trumpets for the first five bars and then abruptly shifts to recorder-oboe-continuo accompaniment as the libretto turns to the matter at hand, civic governance.
5. The alto aria, scored for two unison recorders and continuo, is the heart of the cantata. The text is the cantata's only reference to the New Testament (*Romans 18:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities*) but Bach's aria is anything but stern. Set in the key of g minor, it is quiet, even somber, perhaps Bach's reminder to the new governors that they are human and subject to flaw.
6. The soprano recitative addresses the city fathers, both the retiring group and the newly installed group.
7. The festive spirit returns for the second chorus, a *da capo* rondo, which is scored like the first (trumpets, recorders, oboes, strings) and also uses dotted rhythms in the ritornellos. Bach sets the first vocal section (Psalm 126:3 *The Lord has done good things for us/for this we rejoice*) as a fugue with exposition, counter-exposition and *stretto*. The middle section, which assures the faithful that the Lord will provide support to the new town fathers, alternates homophonic vocal passages with the dotted rhythms of the instruments. Gradually, the two groups merge for two final cadences, both on the dominant, which led to the return of the opening ritornello-fugue-ritornello.

Ritornello	A–Psalm	Ritornello	B–Councilors	Ritornello	A–Psalm	Ritornello
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8. The final recitative is a plea to God that He listen to the prayers of the faithful.
9. The chorale, a prayer to God to look after his people, is a single distich lifted from Martin Luther's *Te deum* combined with the final Amen. The melody for the entire *Te deum* is based on early Christian plainsong which itself was derived from an evening song of the late Jewish synagogue and/or from early Christian rites.

Tonal Structure

BWV 119 is an ascent-descent cantata, beginning neutrally with no sharps/flats, ascending to one sharp, descending to one flat, and returning to no sharps/flats. The city and its people are thus identified as the New Zion and God's chosen people (movements 1 and 2), elevated toward heaven (movement 3), reminded, through the descent into flats, of their human and flawed nature (movement 5), and finally returned to neutral to praise God for watching over his earthly governors. The section of the *Te deum* from which the chorale melody is derived is modal but the Amen (not a part of the original Martin Luther text) is major, and Bach's harmony moves from a quiet E minor to the joyful C major ending. In this way Bach cycles the cantata back to its festive beginning, reminding the faithful that time in God's world is cyclic and that the return to the origin always comes with new knowledge and understanding.

	C	G	G	C	g	F→G	C	C→e	e→C
# 4 b	1 Chorus	2 Recit	3 Aria	4 Recit	5 Aria	6 Recit	7 Chorus	8 Recit	Chorale
	Praise God	Leipzig is the New Zion and its faithful are God's chosen people	Blessings flow through God and authority is the gift of God	Thanks be to God and rejoice	Plea to God to listen, prayer and amen				
Era & text source	OT: Psalm 147	OT: Psalm 85	NT: Rom 13.1	OT: Psalm 126	CE: Te deum				

See Eric Chafe, *Tonal Analysis*, pp 155–160, for further discussion of the tonality of this cantata.