

BWV 130 - "Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir"

Cantata for the Feast of St. Michael

1. Chorus

**Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir
Und sollen billig danken dir
Für dein Geschöpf der Engel schon,
Die um dich schwebn um deinen Thron.**

1. Chorus

**Lord God, we all praise You
and shall rightly thank You.
Indeed, for your creation of the angels,
who hover around You above Your throne.**

Verse 1

Praise God for angels

2. Rezitativ A

Ihr heller Glanz und hohe Weisheit zeigt,
Wie Gott sich zu uns Menschen neigt,
Der solche Helden, solche Waffen
Vor uns geschaffen.
Sie ruhen ihm zu Ehren nicht;
Ihr ganzer Fleiß ist nur dahin gericht',
**Daß sie, Herr Christe, um dich sein
Und um dein armes Häuflein:**
Wie nötig ist doch diese Wacht
Bei Satans Grimm und Macht?

2. Recitative A

Their brilliant radiance and exalted wisdom shows
how God inclines to us humans,
such heroes, such weapons
has he created for us.
They do not rest from honoring Him;
All their diligence is directed to this alone,
**that they might be around You, Lord Christ,
and around Your poor little flock:**
How necessary, indeed, is this watch
amidst Satan's wrath and might?

Verses 2–3

Description of angels

3. Arie B

Der alte Drache brennt vor Neid
Und dichtet stets auf neues Leid,
Daß er das kleine Häuflein trennet.
Er tilget gern, was Gottes ist,
Bald braucht er List,
Weil er nicht Rast noch Ruhe kennet.

3. Aria B

The old dragon burns with envy
and constantly devises new harm
so that he can divide the little flock.
He gladly subverts what is God's,
quickly using cunning,
since he knows neither rest nor repose.

Verses 4–6

Description of Satan

4. Rezitativ (Duett) S T

Wohl aber uns, daß Tag und Nacht
Die Schar der Engel wacht,
Des Satans Anschlag zu zerstören!
Ein Daniel, so unter Löwen stitzt,
Erfährt, wie ihn die Hand des Engels schützt.
Wenn dort die Glut
In Babels Ofen keinen Schaden tut,
So lassen Gläubige ein Danklied hören,
So stellt sich in Gefahr
Noch itzt der Engel Hülfe dar.

4. Recitative (Duet) S T

But happy are we, that day and night
the host of angels watches over,
ready to destroy Satan's plot!
A Daniel, sitting among the lions,
discovers the angels' hand protecting him.
When the fire there
in Babylon's furnace does no harm,
then the faithful let a song of thanks be heard,
thus in danger
even today the angels' help appears.

Verses 7–8

Angels' protection

Daniel 6.23

Daniel 3.1

5. Arie T

Laß, o Fürst der Cherubinen,
Dieser Helden hohe Schar
Immerdar Deine Gläubigen bedienen;
Daß sie auf Elias Wagen
Sie zu dir gen Himmel tragen.

5. Aria T

O Prince of the cherubim,
Let the exalted host of heroes
Forever minister to Your faithful;
so that upon Elijah's chariot
they may be carried to You in heaven.

Verses 7–9

Prayer for angels'
protection

2 Kings 2.11

6. Choral

Darum wir billig loben dich
 Und danken dir, Gott ewiglich,
 Wie auch der lieben Engel Schar
 Dich preisen heut und immerdar.

Und bitten dich, wollst allezeit.
 Dieselben heißen sein bereit,
 Zu schützen deine kleine Herd,
 So hält dein göttlichs Wort in Wert.

6. Chorale

Therefore we rightly praise You
 and thank You, God, eternally,
 Just as also the dear host of angels
 praises You now and always.

And we pray that You, at all times,
 would bid them to be ready
 to protect Your little flock,
 so that it holds Your divine word precious.

Verses 11–12

Praise and
 thanksgiving

Composite translation

BWV 130 Herr Gott, dich loben alle wir

This chorale cantata was composed for St. Michael's Day, September 29, 1724. The chorale tune is from the Geneva Psalter of 1551 where it is ascribed to Louis Bourgeois who likely adapted it from a French folk melody. In the Geneva Psalter and its German translation, the tune is the setting for Psalm 134 while in the Anglo-Geneva Psalter (1561) it is the setting for Psalm 100 (Hence the name "Old Hundredth"). Bach uses an entirely different chorale text, one written by Paul Eber (1554) who adapted it from Phillippe Meanchton's *Dicimus gratis tibi* (1539). Thus both text and melody come from the early days of the Protestant Reformation and reflect the theme of an embattled faithful looking to God and his angels for protection.

1. In the opening chorus, scored for 3 trumpets & timpani, 3 oboes, and strings, Bach creates three basic motifs: the major triad, the slurred step, and the turn. Each instrumental group plays each motif in myriad variations and often antiphonally.

Triadic motif

Bar 1, trumpets ascending; oboes descending; strings ascending & descending



Stepping motif

Bar 1, 2nd half, violins, ascending; bar 7 continuo descending; bar 8 trumpets, descending



Turning motif

Bar 4, trumpets & strings;

bar 5, continuo;

bar 10, trumpets



When the voices enter, the soprano intones the *cantus firmus* while the lower voices create a polyphonic texture out of variations of the triadic and turning motifs. The text, verse 1 of the chorale, praises God for creating angels.

2. The *secco* recitative for alto combines verses 2 and 3, connecting God's love for humanity with the angels who provide protection against Satan.
3. In the *da capo* aria for bass and the trumpet/timpani group, the triadic motif of the opening chorus appears in new variations in both vocal and instrumental parts. The text, verses 4–6 of the chorale, describes Satan as envious of God's people and craftily seeking to scatter the flock. In the first section Bach uses *hockets* in the long *melismas* to depict Satan's attempt to "divide the band." In the middle section, Bach emphasizes "rest" ("He knows neither rest nor peace") in two ways, first by giving the

bass a long held note as if the rest were peaceful instead of a cunning ploy; and second, “rest” is set to a particularly twisting melisma, a display of Satan’s wiles.

4. The recitative for soprano, tenor, and strings serves to calm the faithful after the ferocious display of Satan’s might. The two voices sing mainly in parallel with occasional imitative breaks while the strings’ sustained notes hover like angels watching over. The text, verses 7–9, reminds the faithful that if the Old Testament Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could be rescued from imminent danger, then so shall angels be always present today.
5. The *da capo* aria (tenor, flute, and continuo) is a gavotte—a popular 18th century dance that begins mid-measure and balances a subject with an answer. Here Bach sets the subject as the typical 4-measure line but varies the answer from 6 to 8 to even 12 measures. Both flute and tenor offer melodic embellishments. The text, verse 10, is a prayer to the “Prince of Cherubim” to let the angel host be present everywhere to serve humanity. In the middle section, the faithful are promised that they will be carried heavenward in Elijah’s chariot. Here Bach sets “carry” to three rising *melismas*, voice and flute chasing each other in rising polyphonic flourishes.
6. The closing chorale, scored like the opening chorus, finishes the text with the final two verses. It is essentially a prayer of thanksgiving to God whose angel host is always present and always protecting.

Tonality

For BWV 130, Bach chooses the neutral key of C major but sets the second aria in G major (one sharp) before returning to C major for the chorale.

	1 Chorus	2 Recit	3 Aria	4 Recit	5 Aria	6 Chorale
#			A-E-A		G+	
♯	C+	IV->V	C+	iii->V		C+

Both arias feature modulations into distant keys. In the middle section of the first aria—Satan’s aria—Bach modulates into flats, with the final *melisma* in B \flat major (2 flats). In middle section of the second aria—the angels’ aria—Bach modulates into deep sharps, moving the intertwining vocal and flute lines all the way to F \sharp major (6 sharps). Thus Bach uses tonal allegory of flats and sharps to distinguish Satan’s underworld and the angels’ sojourns on earth and in heaven.

Scripture for the day

Revelation 12:7-12 (KJV)

7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. 12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.