

Cantata for the First Day of Pentecost

BWV 34 "O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe" (1746 or 1747)

1. Chor

O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe,
Entzünde die Herzen und weihe sie ein.
Laß himmlische Flammen durchdringen und wallen,
Wir wünschen, o Höchster, dein Tempel zu sein,
Ach, laß dir die Seelen im Glauben gefallen.

2. Rezitativ T

Herr, unsre Herzen halten dir
Dein Wort der Wahrheit für:
Du willst bei Menschen gerne sein,
Drum sei das Herze dein;
Herr, ziehe gnädig ein.
Ein solch erwähltes Heiligtum
Hat selbst den größten Ruhm.

3. Arie A

Wohl euch, ihr auserwählten Seelen,
Die Gott zur Wohnung ausersehn.
Wer kann ein größer Heil erwählen?
Wer kann des Segens Menge zählen?
Und dieses ist vom Herrn geschehn.

4. Rezitativ B

Erwählt sich Gott die heiligen Hütten,
Die er mit Heil bewohnt,
So muß er auch den Segen auf sie schütten,
So wird der Sitz des Heiligtums belohnt.
Der Herr ruft über sein geweihtes Haus
Das Wort des Segens aus:

5. Chor

Friede über Israel.

Dankt den höchsten Wunderhänden,
Dankt, Gott hat an euch gedacht.
Ja, sein Segen wirkt mit Macht,
Friede über Israel,
Friede über euch zu senden.

1. Chorus

O eternal fire, o fount of love,
ignite our hearts and consecrate them.
Let heavenly flames penetrate and well up,
we wish, o Highest, to be Your temple,
Ah, may our souls be pleasing to you in faith!

2. Recitative T

Lord, let our hearts keep fast
Your word of truth.
You delight to be with mankind,
Therefore let my heart be Yours;
Lord, enter graciously in.
Such a chosen shrine
has itself the greatest renown.

3. Aria A

Blessed are you, you chosen souls,
whom God has chosen as his dwelling.
Who could choose a greater bliss?
Who can reckon the throng of blessings?
And this has come from the Lord.

4. Recitative B

If God chooses the holy dwellings
that He inhabits with salvation,
so must He also scatter blessings upon them,
so will the site of the sacrament be rewarded.
The Lord proclaims over His consecrated
house/this word of blessing:

5. Chorus

Peace upon Israel.

Thanks to the exalted wondrous hands,
give thanks, God has considered you.
Indeed, His blessing works with power,
to send peace upon Israel,
peace upon you.

Acts 2:3 "...cloven
tongues as of fire..."
I Cor 3:16 "...you are
God's temple ...
God's spirit dwells
in you"
John 14:23 Whoever
loves me will keep
my word..."

Blessings on those
chosen by God

Ps 118:2-2 "and this
is the Lord's doing."

Psalm 128:5-6 May
the LORD bless you
from Zion....
6...peace be on
Israel.
John 14:27 Peace I
leave with you..."

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BWV 34 is one of Bach's last sacred cantatas, first performed in 1746 or 1747; the two choruses and the aria, however, are parodies of a 1726 wedding cantata of the same name. Only the parts for singers, violin 1, viola, and continuo remain of the earlier cantata, but these, for the most part, closely match the music of BWV 34.

Pentecost, in Bach's time, was a major religious festival. In the general European culture, sounding trumpets represented "the rushing mighty wind" and candle flames the "cloven tongues of fire," images used to describe the descent of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost (Acts 2:2-3). Bach's libretto, revised from the earlier wedding cantata, begins with these flames penetrating the hearts of the faithful so that their bodies might be consecrated as temples for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (see I Cor. 3:16 "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?").

1. The opening movement is a joyful *da capo* chorus with trumpets, oboes, and strings. Long held notes and busy eighth- and sixteenth-note motifs move from instrument to instrument and from voice to voice. The harmonies of the A section are in the bright keys of D and A major through which the imitative voices create numerous passing dissonances. For each cadence, a lilting motif takes over, as if the heart, sparked by divine flames, could do no other than dance.

In the middle section, Bach lets the dance motif dominate as he moves the harmonies deeper into sharps, cadencing twice in C# major. Between the two C# major cadences, Bach inserts a brief fugue, which

he surely meant as a metaphor for the Old Testament Law, a reminder that the first Pentecost fell on the Jewish festival of Shabuot celebrating Moses receiving the Ten Commandments.

The joyful A section reprise returns the faithful to contemplating the eternal flame that transforms the human body into a divine temple.

2. The recitative is a personal plea for the Holy Spirit to enter the heart of the faithful. Bach's setting for tenor moves the harmony from B minor (relative minor of the preceding chorus) to F# minor (relative minor of the following A major aria).
3. The beautiful alto *da capo* aria is a hushed blessing for those chosen by God for his dwelling place. The melody is like a lullaby, and in fact the beginning of the motif and the repeated-note accompaniment of the continuo are quite similar to the third movement of the 1727 cantata, BWV 82, the bass (or alto) aria "Rest in sleep, you weary eyes." Two flutes double, an octave higher, the first and second violins in parallel thirds and sixths. The "blessed are you" words appear again and again as sigh motifs, and the upper instruments drop out to let the alto repeat the "souls whom God has chosen as his dwelling." In the B section, alto and continuo move together while the upper instruments play imitative echoes of the line, "Who can count the blessings? This is the Lord's doing."
4. The bass recitative is a solemn proclamation of the rewards of faith, leading without break to the final chorus.
5. The chorus begins with a two-bar adagio, broad chords for the quote from Psalm 128:6, "Peace be upon Israel." An *alla breve* rondo follows, bright with trumpets, oboes, and strings sounding a rising scale motif that is then taken up by the chorus on the words "Thanks be to the Highest." The original words, for the earlier wedding cantata and sung to the bride and groom, are "Hurry to those holy seats"; several commentators have remarked that the rising scale motif works better with "hurry" than with "thanks." However, Bach has used similar motifs for both concepts; notably "We thank thee, God" of BWV 29 (along with the "Gratias" of the B Minor Mass); and "Let us go the Bethlehem (i.e. hurry)" of the Christmas Oratorio and "Hurry to Golgotha" of the St. John's Passion. (He also used this motif for the third movement of the Italian Concerto.)

Tonal Structure

Bach's harmonies throughout this cantata are sharp and sharper, appropriate for both the original occasion of holy matrimony and the later festival of Pentecost. In the opening chorus, the modulation into C# major can be read as tonal allegory, signaling that the faithful, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, are as close as they can be to the divine.

The pinnacle comes with the word "temple" on a G# major dominant.

	1 Chorus	2 Recit	3 Aria	4 Recit	5 Chorus
###			A-E-A		
##	D-A-D/f#-C#-f#/D-A-D	b->f#		f#->A	D-A-D

Lessons for Pentecost

Acts 2:1-4 (KJV)

1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

John 14:23-31 (KJV)

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. 24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. 25 These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. 26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. 27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Also relevant to BWV 34

1 Corinthians 3:12-16 (KJV)

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

Original texts for the choruses and aria

BWV 34a - "O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe" Wedding Cantata (1726)

1. Chor

O ewiges Feuer, o Ursprung der Liebe,
Entzünde der Herzen geweihten Altar.
Laß himmlische Flammen durchdringen und wallen,
Ach laß doch auf dieses vereinigte Paar
Die Funken der edelsten Regungen fallen.

4. Chor

Friede über Israel!
Eilt zu denen heiligen Stufen,
Eilt, der Höchste neigt sein Ohr,
Unser Wünschen dringt hervor,
Friede über Israel,
Friede über euch zu senden. (Psalm 128:6)

5. Arie A

Wohl euch, ihr auserwählten Seelen,
Die ein getreuer Jacob liebt.
Sein Lohn wird dort am größten werden,
Den ihm der Herr bereits auf Erden
Durch seiner Rahel Anmut gibt.

1. Chorus

O eternal fire, o source of love,
ignite the sacred altar of their hearts.
Let heavenly flames penetrate and surge,
Ah, may upon this united pair
the sparks of noblest impulse fall.

4. Chorus

Peace upon Israel.
Hurry to those holy seats,
hurry, the Highest bends His ear,
our wishes reach up to Him,
to send peace upon Israel,
peace upon you.

5. Aria A

It is well for you, you chosen souls,
whom a faithful Jacob loves.
His reward will be greatest there,
for to him the Lord already on earth
through his Rachel gives devotion.