

BWV 64 "Sehet, welch eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget," cantata for the third day of Christmas

1. Chor

*Sehet, welch eine Liebe hat uns der
Vater erzeiget, daß wir Gottes Kinder
heißen.*

1. Chorus

*Behold, what love has the Father
shown to us, that we are called the
children of God.*

Scripture: 1 John 3:1

2. Choral

Das hat er alles uns getan,
Sein groß Lieb zu zeigen an.
Des freu sich alle Christenheit
Und dank ihm des in Ewigkeit.
Kyrieleis!

2. Chorale

All this He has done for us,
to show His great love,
For this, let all Christianity rejoice
and thank Him in eternity.
Kyrieleis!

Chorale text & tune: *Gelobet
seist du, Jesu Christ, v 7*

3. Rezitativ A

Geh, Welt! behalte nur das Deine,
Ich will und mag nichts von dir haben,
Der Himmel ist nun meine,
An diesem soll sich meine Seele laben.
Dein Gold ist ein vergänglich Gut,
Dein Reichtum ist geborget,
Wer dies besitzt, der ist gar schlecht
versorget.
Drum sag ich mit getrostem Mut:

3. Recitative A

Go, world! keep what is yours,
I would desire nothing from you;
heaven is now mine,
as this my soul refreshes itself.
Your gold is a perishable possession
your wealth borrowed.
Whoever possesses it is indeed poorly
provided for.
Therefore I say with confident
courage:

Rejection of the world

4. Choral

Was frag ich nach der Welt
Und allen ihren Schätzen
Wenn ich mich nur an dir,
Mein Jesu, kann ergötzen!
Dich hab ich einzig mir
Zur Wollust vorgestellt:
Du, du bist meine Lust;
Was frag ich nach der Welt!

4. Chorale

What should I ask of the world
and all its treasures
when only in You,
My Jesus, can I find delight!
You alone I imagined
for pleasure:
You, You are my joy;
What should I ask of the world!

Chorale text: *Was frag ich
nach der Welt v 1*
Chorale tune: *O Gott du
frommer Gott*

5. Arie S

Was die Welt
In sich hält,
Muß als wie ein Rauch vergehen.
Aber was mir Jesus gibt
Und was meine Seele liebt,
Bleibet fest und ewig stehen.

5. Aria S

Whatever the world
Contains within itself
must vanish like smoke.
But what my Jesus gives me
and what my soul loves,
remains sure and lasts forever.

Meditation
Cf Ps 37.20 The enemies of
the Lord are like the glories
of the pastures, they vanish,
like smoke they vanish
away.

6. Rezitativ B

Der Himmel bleibet mir gewiß,
Und den besitz ich schon im Glauben.
Der Tod, die Welt und Sünde,
Ja selbst das ganze Höllenheer
Kann mir, als einem Gotteskinde,
Denselben nun und nimmermehr
Aus meiner Seele rauben.
Nur dies, nur einzig dies macht mir
noch Kummernis,
Daß ich noch länger soll auf dieser
Welt verweilen;
Denn Jesus will den Himmel mit mir
teilen,
Und darzu hat er mich erkoren,
Deswegen ist er Mensch geboren.

6. Recitative B

Heaven remains certain for me,
and in faith I already possess it.
Death, the world, and sin,
even the whole host of hell
cannot—since I am a child of God—
now or ever
steal from my soul.
Only this, this alone troubles me still,

that I yet longer must in this world
abide.
For Jesus wants to share heaven with
me,
For that He has chosen me,
for that He was born a man.

Heaven is certain, death
will bring me to it.

7. Arie A

Von der Welt verlang ich nichts,
Wenn ich nur den Himmel erbe.
Alles, alles geb ich hin,
Weil ich genug versichert bin,
Daß ich ewig nicht verderbe.

7. Aria A

From this world, I desire nothing.
when I can inherit heaven.
I give away everything, everything,
for I am confident enough,
that I will not be eternally destroyed.

Meditation
Confidence of faith

8. Choral

Gute Nacht, o Wesen,
Das die Welt erlesen!
Mir gefälltst du nicht.
Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden,
Bleibet weit dahinten,
Kommt nicht mehr ans Licht!
Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht!
Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben,
Gute Nacht gegeben!

8. Chorale

Good night, existence
that cherishes the world!
You do not please me.
Good night, sins,
remain far behind me,
come to light no more!
Good night, pride and pomp!
And to you, life of corruption,
Good night be given!

Chorale text & tune: *Jesu,
meine Freude*
v 5

Composite translation

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BWV 64 *Sehet, welch eine Liebe hat uns der Vater erzeiget*, first performed on the December 27, 1723, belongs to Bach's spectacular first Christmas season in Leipzig. Within the span of a little over 2 weeks, Bach presented 6 newly composed cantatas, one revised one, the *Sanctus* in D major (BWV 238), and the first version of the *Magnificat* (BWV 243a). Both *Sanctus* and *Magnificat* were performed at services on Christmas Day, along with the Weimar BWV 63, and repeated on December 26, along with the newly composed BWV 40. These were followed by BWV 64 (December 27), BWV 190 (January 1), BWV 150 (January 2), BWV 65 (January 6), and BWV 154 (January 9), all fresh from Bach's pen.

Libretto

Bach (or someone under his supervision) adapted the libretto for this cantata from a 1721 Christmas cantata text by contemporary Johann Knauer of Gotha. The original libretto is in two parts, doubling the formulaic chorus-recitative-aria-recitative-aria-chorale. Bach combined the text of the opening of Part I

with the recitatives, arias, and chorale from Part II, changing words and phrases as needed to suit his own music (a facsimile of Knauer's libretto follows these comments). The two extra chorales inserted by Bach create the theological and musical balance that he wanted.

Motet

The opening chorus of BWV 64 is a motet. In Bach's time, the term defined a sacred choral composition in which instruments double vocal lines, with the continuo independent and/or doubling the bass. The term also designated a contrapuntal style of composition, often called *stile antico* or "in the style of Palestrina." The text for a motet was always either a verse from Scripture (as in BWV 64) or a chorale text or sometimes a combination of the two.

These characteristics distinguished the motet from the more contemporary style of choral music set to madrigalian poetry with independent instrumental parts. Some of Bach's critics scorned the motet as "old-fashioned," one going so far as to personalize the disdain: "I leave the explication of motets to the Thuringian yokels...." Bach, of course, was not only proud of his Thuringian heritage, he also perceived himself as an integrator of old and new. If the objective of contemporary sacred vocal music was to present the text clearly and express a single affect through a leading melody, the old-style motet, with its equality of voices and traditional text, was just as important for conveying a theological message.

Theology

John Elliot Gardiner notes that the archaic style of the opening movement is a strong symbol for the foundation of God's love. The motet, a four-voice fugue with trombones, oboes and strings doubling the voices, builds from an orderly exposition through two episodes to a dramatic deceptive cadence followed by a calm final cadence. Clarity, complexity, triumph—all elements that the Faithful come to understand as God's love incarnate. The following chorale (No. 2), *Gelobet seist du Jesu Christ*, is a tender affirmation of the Faithful at the manger. As the Leipzig congregation had just sung it on Christmas Day, they would have been fully aware that the complete hymn is a commentary on the paradox of Christ's incarnation in poverty and the polarity between the rich and poor, as preached by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:9 (For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich). This contrast between the false wealth of the world and the true riches of heaven is threaded throughout the libretto.

While the words of the cantata emphasize the wealth/poverty contrast, Bach's music interprets the incarnation in terms of descent and ascent: God descends to earth to take on human form and in so doing, elevates humanity to the status of children of God. The Faithful aspire to be worthy of their status by renouncing the world and look to their ultimate ascent to heaven, which comes through death. So in the recitative (No. 3), while the alto sings of the perishability of things of the world, the continuo ascends through one scale after another, then descends, then ascends again. Bach creates a sharp harmonic ascent by moving from the key of C (♮) to the key of D (##) of the following chorale (No. 4). "What care I for this world," sung to the chorale tune *O Gott du frommer Gott*, sets the human aspiration to reject the world within the four square structure of the church. In the meditative aria (No. 5), a courtly gavotte, Bach continues the ascent motive, but here, the lines of the first violins seem also to illustrate how worldly things rise and vanish like smoke. As if to point to the difficulty of true faith, the continuo injects notes of uncertainty with quavering figures, and, in the B section, drops out entirely for 14 bars. Supported only by the upper strings, the alto sustains notes to point to the steadfastness of Jesus' love.

The bass recitative (No. 6) turns from the ascent-descent symbolism of the incarnation to the representation of faith itself. The text declares the certainty of faith, but Bach represents the treacheries that faith must overcome (death, the world, sin) with tritone intervals in the vocal line and diminished chords in the continuo. The tension relaxes for the cadence in G major, but in the following aria (No. 7), , Bach sets the lyric longing for heaven within a complex rhythmic structure of shifting stresses for alto and oboe d'amore over a steady beat in the continuo. Complexity and surety: a perfect metaphor for faith overcoming the difficulties of this world on the path to heaven in the next. At the end of the B section, the oboe drops out and the continuo sets its own rhythmic irregularities against the alto, but at the cadence,

their rhythms are synchronized—as surely the Faithful must be synchronized with Christ— before the *da capo* return.

Bach closes with a final goodbye to the world using the fifth verse of the chorale *Jesu, meine Freude*, “Goodnight, world” (No. 8).

Overall tonal structure

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
##				chorale	aria			
#	chorus					recit	aria	chorale
5		chorale	recit					
key	e	G	C->D	D	b	D->G	G	E
	Descent: God descends to earth to save mankind		Ascent: the Faithful aspire to be children of God			Steadfastness: faith is the pathway to heaven		Farewell to world & sin

Facsimile pages from Johann Knauer's cantata book with references to libretto of BWV 64



BWV 64

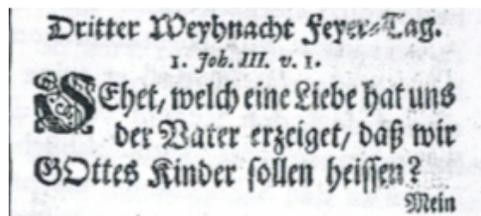
Opening chorus

First recitative

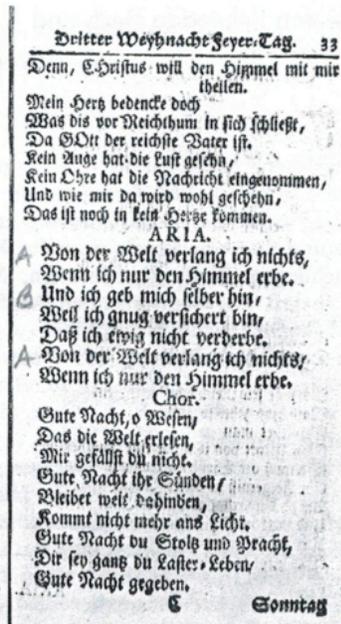
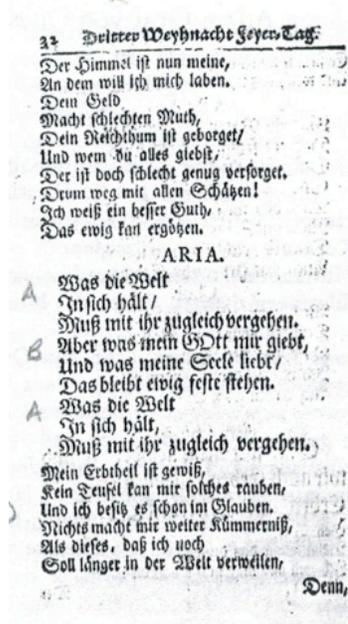
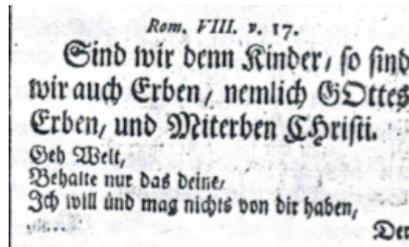
First recit continued

First aria

Second recit



BWV 64



Second recit continued

Second aria

Final chorale