= Christ lag in Todes Banden , BWV 4 =

Christ lag in Todes Banden (also spelled Todesbanden) (" Christ lay in death 's bonds " or " Christ lay in the snares of death ") , BWV 4 , is a cantata for Easter by German composer Johann Sebastian Bach , one of his earliest church cantatas . It was probably intended for a performance in 1707 , an early work in the genre to which he later contributed complete cantata cycles for all occasions of the liturgical year . It was related to his application for a post at a Lutheran church at Mühlhausen . John Eliot Gardiner describes it as Bach 's " first @-@ known attempt at painting narrative in music " .

Christ lag in Todes Banden is a chorale cantata , a style in which both text and music are based on a hymn . In this instance , the source was Martin Luther 's hymn of the same name , the main hymn for Easter in the Lutheran church . The composition is based on the seven stanzas of the hymn and its tune , which was derived from Medieval models . Bach used the unchanged words of a stanza of the chorale in each of the seven vocal movements , in the format of chorale variations per omnes versus (for all stanzas) , and he used its tune as a cantus firmus . After an opening sinfonia , the variations are arranged symmetrically : chorus ? duet ? solo ? chorus ? solo ? duet ? chorus , with the focus on the central fourth stanza about the battle between Life and Death . All movements are in E minor , and Bach achieves variety and intensifies the meaning of the text through many musical forms and techniques .

Christ lag in Todes Banden is Bach 's first cantata for Easter ? in fact , his only extant original composition for the first day of the feast ? and his earliest surviving chorale cantata . He later repeatedly performed it as Thomaskantor in Leipzig , beginning in 1724 when he first celebrated Easter there . Only this second version survives . It is scored for four vocal parts and a Baroque instrumental ensemble , with a choir of cornetto and three trombones doubling the choral voices , a string section of two violins , two violas , and continuo . This exemplifies a 17th @-@ century " Choralkonzert " (chorale concerto) style ; the lost scoring of the earlier performances was perhaps similar .

Gardiner calls Bach 's setting of Luther 's hymn " a bold , innovative piece of musical drama " , and observes " his total identification with the spirit and letter of Luther 's fiery , dramatic hymn " .

= = Composition history = =

= = = Background = = =

Bach is believed to have written Christ lag in Todes Banden in 1707 . He was a professional organist aged 22 , employed from 1703 in Arnstadt as the organist of the New Church (which replaced the burned Bonifatiuskirche , today known as the Bach Church) . At age 18 , he had inspected the new organ built by Johann Friedrich Wender , was invited to play one Sunday , and was hired . The organ was built on the third tier of a theatre @-@ like church . Bach 's duties as a church musician involved some responsibility for choral music , but the exact year he began composing cantatas is unknown . Christ lag in Todes Banden is one of a small group of cantatas that survive from his early years .

In Arnstadt , the Kantor (church musician) Heindorff was responsible for church music in the Upper Church (Liebfrauenkirche) , and the New Church where Bach was the organist . He typically conducted music in the Upper Church and would appoint a choir prefect for vocal music in the New Church . Wolff notes that " subjecting his works to the questionable leadership of a prefect " was not what Bach would have done . Therefore , most cantatas of the period are not for Sunday occasions , but restricted to special occasions such as weddings and funerals . Christ lag in Todes Banden is the only exception , but was most likely composed not for Arnstadt but for an application to a more important post at the Divi Blasii church in Mühlhausen .

= = = Bach 's early cantatas = = =

Bach 's early cantatas are " Choralkonzerte " (chorale concertos) in the style of the 17th century , different from the recitative and aria cantata format associated with Neumeister that Bach started to use for church cantatas in 1714 . Wolff points out the relation of Bach 's early cantatas to works by Dieterich Buxtehude , with whom Bach had studied in Lübeck . Christ lag in Todes Banden shows similarities to a composition of Johann Pachelbel based on the same Easter chorale . Although there is no evidence that Bach and Pachelbel met , Bach grew up in Thuringia while Pachelbel was based in the same region , and Bach 's elder brother and teacher Johann Christoph Bach studied with Pachelbel in Erfurt . Another of Pachelbel 's works appears to be referenced in the early Bach cantata , Nach dir , Herr , verlanget mich , BWV 150 , and there has been recent speculation that Bach wanted to pay tribute to Pachelbel after his death in 1706 .

The texts for the early cantatas were drawn mostly from biblical passages and hymns . Features characteristic of his later cantatas , such as recitatives and arias on contemporary poetry , were not yet present , although Bach may have heard them in oratorios by Buxtehude , or even earlier . Instead , these early cantatas include 17th @-@ century elements such as motets and chorale concertos . They often begin with an instrumental sinfonia or sonata (sonatina) . The following table lists the seven extant works composed by Bach until 1708 , when he moved on to the Weimar court .

Bach uses the limited types of instruments at his disposal for unusual combinations , such as two recorders and two viole da gamba in the funeral cantata Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit , also known as Actus Tragicus . He uses instruments of the continuo group as independent parts , such as a cello in Nach dir , Herr , verlanget mich and a bassoon in Der Herr denket an uns . The cantata for the inauguration of a town council is richly scored for trumpets , woodwinds and strings . Wolff notes :

The overall degree of mastery by which these early pieces compare favourably with the best church compositions from the first decade of the eighteenth century ... proves that the young Bach did not confine himself to playing organ and clavier , but , animated by his Buxtehude visit , devoted considerable time and effort to vocal composition . The very few such early works that exist , each a masterpiece in its own right , must constitute a remnant only ... of a larger body of similar compositions .

The Bach scholar Richard D. P. Jones notes in The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach :

" His remarkable flair for test illustration is evident even in the early cantatas , particularly the two finest of them , the Actus tragicus , BWV 106 , and Christ lag in Todes Banden , BWV 4 . We already sense a powerful mind behind the notes in the motivic unity of the early cantatas , in the use of reprise to bind their mosaic forms together ... "

= = = Readings and chorale = = =

The prescribed readings for the feast day were from the First letter to the Corinthians (" Christ is our Easter lamb " ? 1 Corinthians 5 : 6 ? 8) and from the Gospel of Mark (the Resurrection of Jesus ? Mark 16 : 1 ? 8) .

The reformer Martin Luther wrote several hymns in German to be used in church services . His hymn " Christ lag in Todes Banden " was based on the Latin hymn " Victimae Paschali Laudes " , and first published in 1524 . It became a main Easter hymn in German Lutheranism . The hymn stresses the struggle between Life and Death . The third stanza refers to the " sting of death " , as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15 . The fifth stanza relates to the " Osterlamm " , the Paschal Lamb . The sacrificial " blood " (" Its blood marks our doors ") refers to the marking of the doors before the exodus from Egypt . The final stanza recalls the tradition of baking and eating Easter Bread , with the " old leaven " alluding again to the exodus , in contrast to the " Word of Grace " , concluding " Christ would ... alone nourish the soul . " In contrast to most chorale cantatas that Bach composed later in Leipzig , the text of the chorale is retained unchanged , which he did again only in late chorale cantatas .

= = = Performances = = =

Christ lag in Todes Banden survives in a version from the 1720s when Bach held the position of Thomaskantor (director of church music) in Leipzig . There is documentary evidence suggesting that this Easter Sunday cantata was premiered in 1707 . It is known that Bach performed a cantata of his own composition at Easter in 1707 as a part of his application for the post of organist of Divi Blasii church in Mühlhausen , and this may have been Christ lag in Todes Banden . By this time , Bach was already demonstrating ingenuity in keyboard music , as known from the early works in the Neumeister Collection . Christ lag in Todes Banden is a significant milestone in his vocal music . It was completed seven years before his sequence of Weimar cantatas , begun in 1714 with Himmelskönig , sei willkommen , BWV 182 , and 17 years before he started a complete annual cycle of chorale cantatas in Leipzig in the middle of 1724 with O Ewigkeit , du Donnerwort , BWV 20 .

Bach would have been attracted to Mühlhausen for its status as a free imperial city and its several churches and tradition of vocal music . Wolff notes that Bach possibly sent two other cantata scores with his application , and once he knew the date of the audition may have composed Christ lag in Todes Banden in addition . A month after Easter , on 24 May 1707 , an agreement was reached to hire Bach , who seems to have been the only candidate considered seriously .

Bach performed the cantata again while Thomaskantor in Leipzig , notably at his first Easter there on 9 April 1724 . He also performed it the following year on 1 April 1725 , in his second cycle of Leipzig cantatas , a cycle of chorale cantatas based on Lutheran hymns . It followed in the cycle some forty newly composed cantatas . This early work fits the cycle in the sense that it is based on a chorale , but its style is different from the others .

= = Music = =

= = = Scoring and structure = = =

Bach structured the cantata in eight movements : an instrumental sinfonia and seven vocal movements corresponding to the stanzas of the hymn . The duration is given as 22 minutes .

The title of the original parts of the first Leipzig performance is (in Johann Christoph Altnickol 's handwriting) : " Feria Paschatos / Christ lag in Todes Banden / a.4. Voc : / Cornetto / 3 Trombon . / 2 Violini / 2 Viole / con / Continuo / Di Sign . Joh.Seb.Bach " , In this late version , Bach scored the work for four vocal parts (soprano (S) , alto (A) , tenor (T) , and bass (B)) , and a Baroque instrumental ensemble consisting of strings , brass and continuo . The brass parts , a choir of cornetto (Ct) and three trombones (Tb) playing colla parte with the voices at times , may have been added in the 1720s . They may also possibly represent the original scoring , in the style of the 17th @-@ century polychoral tradition .

The scoring of the cantata Christ lag in Todes Banden has been described as " archaic " and its style " medieval " :

The string section consists of two violin parts (Vl) and two viola parts (VA) ; this indicates an older practice as for instance found in 17th @-@ century church cantatas by Bach 's ancestors (see Altbachisches Archiv) , and in Jesus Christus ist um unsrer Missetat willen verwundet , a Passion setting from the early 18th century (or older) which Bach had performed a few years after composing the cantata Christ lag in Todes Banden . In the first half of the 18th century the standard for a string section soon evolved to two violin parts , one viola part and continuo .

The cornett used in the cantata was an instrument that belonged to an earlier age : by the second quarter of the 18th century it had almost entirely disappeared from Bach 's compositions .

Choral singing is less distinguished from sections of the cantata where vocal soloists sing in ensemble : compared to the clear demarcation between choral movements and movements for vocal soloists in Bach 's later works .

The harmony is often modal , instead of the modern tonal system .

In the following table of the movements , the scoring and keys follow the Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe . The keys and time signatures are taken from the book on all cantatas by the Bach scholar Alfred Dürr , using the symbol for common time (4 / 4) and alla breve (2 / 2) . The continuo , played throughout , is not shown .

Hymn tune

Luther 's hymn is based on the 12th @-@ century Easter hymn " Christ ist erstanden " (Christ is risen) , which relies both in text and melody on the sequence for Easter , " Victimae paschali laudes " . A new version was published by Luther in 1524 and adapted by Johann Walter in his Wittenberg hymnal for choir , Eyn geystlich Gesangk Buchleyn (1524) . A slightly modified version appeared in 1533 in a hymnal by Kluge . This chorale tune would have been familiar to Bach 's congregations . Bach composed other arrangements during his career , including the two chorale preludes BWV 625 and BWV 718 , and the " Fantasia super Christ lag in Todes Banden " , BWV 695 . Bach 's organ works and the version in the cantata use the passing notes and regular rhythmic patterns of the 1533 version .

Movements

Unlike in Bach 's later cantatas , all movements are in the same key . The cantata begins with an instrumental sinfonia . The seven stanzas are treated in seven movements as chorale variations " per omnes versus " (for all stanzas) , with the melody always present as a cantus firmus . All stanzas end on the word Halleluja .
The symmetrical sequence of the seven stanzas is a feature more often found in Bach 's mature compositions : chorus ? duet ? solo ? chorus ? solo ? duet ? chorus . The musicologist Carol Traupman @-@ Carr notes the variety of treatment of the seven stanzas , while retaining the same key and melody :
Polyphonic chorale fantasia
Duet , with " walking bass " in continuo
Trio sonata
Polyphonic and imitative , woven around chorale melody
Homophonic with elaborate continuo line
Duet , using trio sonata texture with extensive imitation
Four @-@ part chorale setting (Leipzig version)
John Eliot Gardiner , who conducted the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage in 2000 , calls Bach 's setting of Luther 's hymn " a bold , innovative piece of musical drama " , observing that Bach was " drawing on medieval musical roots (the hymn tune derives from the eleventh @-@ century plainsong ' Victimae paschali laudes ') " , and noting Bach 's " total identification with the spirit and letter of Luther 's fiery , dramatic hymn " . Bach could follow " Luther 's ideal in which music brings the text to life " .

Sinfonia

The cantata begins with an instrumental sinfonia a work in the style of an overture to a contemporary Venetian opera , with chordal passages and occasional polyphony . It introduces the first line of the melody , The mood is sombre , recalling the " Death 's bonds " of the first line of the hymn : Christ 's death on the cross and burial .

Versus 1

The opening stanza , " Christ lag in Todes Banden " (Christ lay in death 's bonds) is treated as a chorale fantasia . Without instrumental opening , the movement starts with the chorale tune sung by the soprano in very long notes , with all other parts entering soon after the soprano begins each choral statement . The alto line is derived from the chorale tune , while the viola parts principally

reinforce the alto and tenor voices . The violin parts are independent and , as Traupman @-@ Carr notes " further activate the texture with a virtually continuous exchange of sixteenth @-@ note snippets " . The figure in the violins known as suspiratio (sigh) reflects " Christ 's suffering in the grip of death " .

The final Halleluja is faster , giving up the fantasia format for a four @-@ part fugue and in motet style , with all instruments doubling the voices . The style of the movement recalls the 16th @-@ century stile antico , although the style is still unmistakably Bach 's .

= = = = Versus 2 = = = =

The second stanza , Aria Duetto , is a duet of soprano and alto , " Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt " (No one could defeat death) , over an ostinato continuo . It deals with " humanity helpless and paralysed as it awaits God 's judgement against sin " . Bach has the music almost freeze on the first words " den Tod " (death) , and the word " gefangen " (imprisoned) is marked by a sharp dissonance of the soprano and alto . In the Halleluja , the voices imitate each other on long notes in fast succession , creating a sequence of suspensions .

= = = = Versus 3 = = = =

The third stanza , " Jesus Christus , Gottes Sohn " (Jesus Christ , God 's Son) , is a trio of the tenor , two obbligato violins and continuo . The tenor sings the chorale melody almost unchanged . The violins illustrate first how Christ slashes at the enemy . The music stops completely on the word " nichts " (nothing) . The violins then present in four notes the outline of the cross , and finally the tenor sings a joyful " Halleluja " to a virtuoso violin accompaniment .

= = = = Versus 4 = = = =

" Es war ein wunderlicher Krieg , da Tod und Leben rungen " (It was a strange battle , that death and life waged) , is the center of the symmetrical structure . It is sung by the four voices , accompanied only by the continuo . The alto sings the cantus firmus , transposed by a fifth to B @-@ Dorian , while the other voices follow each other in a fugal stretto with entries just a beat apart until they fall away one by one . In the final Halleluja in all four voices , the bass descends nearly two octaves .

= = = = Versus 5 = = = =

Stanza five , " Hier ist das rechte Osterlamm " (Here is the true Easter @-@ lamb) , is sung by the bass alone , accompanied at first by a descending chromatic line in the continuo which has been compared to the Crucifixus of the Mass in B minor , but changing to " a dance @-@ like passage of continuous eighth notes " when the voice enters . For every line of the stanza , the bass sings a chorale tune , then repeats the words in counterpoint to the part of the tune repeated in the strings , sometimes transposed . Taruskin describes this : " With its antiphonal exchanges between the singer and the massed strings ... this setting sounds like a parody of a passacaglia @-@ style Venetian opera aria , vintage 1640 " . The bass sings the final victorious Hallelujas , spanning two octaves .

= = = = Versus 6 = = = =

" So feiern wir das hohe Fest " (So we celebrate the high festival) , is a duet for soprano and tenor accompanied only by the ostinato continuo . The chorale is shared by the voices , with the soprano singing it in E minor , the tenor in B minor . The movement is a dance of joy : the word " Wonne " (joy) is rendered in figuration that Gardiner finds reminiscent of Purcell . Bach incorporates the solemn rhythms of the French overture into this verse , reflecting the presence of the word feiern (

celebrate) in the text . It may be the first time that Bach used these rhythms .

= = = = Versus 7 = = = =

Bach 's original setting of the final stanza , " Wir essen und leben wohl " (We eat and live well) , is lost ; it may have been a repeat of the opening chorus . In Leipzig , he supplied a simple four @-@ part setting .

= = Manuscripts and publication = =

The original autograph parts are kept in the Bach @-@ Archiv Leipzig . They were copied from the lost autograph score by six scribes , four of them known by name , including the composer .
A manuscript score by Franz Hauser , dating from c . 1820 ? 1839 , is held by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin ? Preußischer Kulturbesitz . It bears a comment on page 178 : " Nach den auf der Thomasschule befindlichen / Original / : Autograph : / Stimmen in Partitur gebracht . / Lp. d 16 . Oct. 33 . / fHauser " (After the original autograph parts in the Thomasschule , rendered in a score , Leipzig , 16 October 1833) .
The cantata was first published in 1851 as No. 4 in the first volume of the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft Ausgabe (BGA) , edited by Moritz Hauptmann . Half a century later a vocal score of the cantata appeared in Novello 's Original Octavo Edition , under the title Christ Lay in Death 's Dark Prison . The piano reduction was by John E. West , and the translation of the cantata 's text by Paul England . In 1905 this vocal score was republished in the United States by H. W. Gray . Henry S. Drinker 's translation Christ lay by death enshrouded appeared in a score edited by Arnold Schering and published by Eulenburg in 1932 . In 1967 Schering 's score edition was republished by W. W. Norton with an extended introduction and bibliography by Gerhard Herz . Breitkopf & Härtel , the publisher of the BGA , produced various editions of the cantata separately , for instance in 1968 a vocal score with Arno Schönstedt 's piano reduction and Charles Sanford Terry 's translation (Christ lay in Death 's grim prison) .
The New Bach Edition (Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe , NBA) published the score in 1985 , edited by Alfred Dürr , with the critical commentary published the next year . In 1995 Carus produced a revised edition of Hänssler 's 1981 Christ lag in Todesbanden , edited by Reinhold Kubik . Both the Hänssler and the Carus edition contained Jean Lunn 's Christ lay in death 's cold prison translation . Carus followed the NBA 's ... in Todes Banden spelling for the German title . In 2007 Carus republished their score edition with an introduction by Hans @-@ Joachim Schulze . Bach @-@ digital.de published high @-@ resolution facsimile images of the manuscript parts from the first quarter of the 18th century (partly in Bach 's handwriting) , and of an early 19th @-@ century score manuscript derived from these performance parts . Also in the 21st century , Serenissima Music published a vocal score of Christ lag in Todesbanden compatible with Kalmus ' performance material based on the BGA .

= = Selected recordings = =

Christ lag in Todes Banden was recorded early , and has been recorded often ; as of 2016 , the Bach @-@ Cantatas website lists 77 different complete recordings , the earliest dating from 1931 when Lluís Millet conducted the Orfeó Català in Francesc Pujol 's Catalan version of the cantata . The performance was recorded by La Voz de su Amo (His Master 's Voice) and appeared on three 78 rpm discs . It was recorded twice under the direction of Nadia Boulanger , a 1937 version recorded in Paris and a 1938 version recorded in Boston .
There are several recordings from the decades immediately after the war . Robert Shaw recorded the cantata in 1946 and again in 1959 . Günther Ramin conducted the Thomanerchor in 1950 , the anniversary of Bach 's death . The same year , Fritz Lehmann conducted the choir of the Musikhochschule Frankfurt with soloists Helmut Krebs and Dietrich Fischer @-@ Dieskau . Karl Richter and his Münchener Bach @-@ Chor first recorded it in 1958 .

Nikolaus Harnoncourt recorded Christ lag in Todes Banden in 1971 in a historically informed performance with original instruments and male singers (the upper two parts are sung by boys and the countertenor Paul Esswood) . This was at the start of the first project to record all Bach 's sacred cantatas , " J. S. Bach ? Das Kantatenwerk " on Teldec . Christ lag in Todes Banden has since been included in the other " complete sets " , conducted by Rilling , Gardiner , Koopman , Leusink , and Suzuki (details of these recordings are given in the table below) .

The entries in the following sortable table are taken from the listings by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Some recordings rely on choir without (or with few) solo voices . Choirs are roughly marked as large by red background to one voice per part (OVPP) by green background , orchestras from large (red) to period instruments in historically informed performances (green) .

= = Transcriptions = =

In 1926 Walter Rummel published a piano arrangement of the cantata 's fourth movement , " Jesus Christus , Gottes Sohn " . George Copeland recorded this transcription in 1938 (re @-@ issued on CD 2001) , and Jonathan Plowright recorded it in 2005 .

After he had recorded his orchestration of the chorale prelude Christ lag in Todesbanden , BWV 718 , in 1931 , Leopold Stokowski recorded his arrangement for symphonic orchestra of BWV 4 's fourth movement in 1937 . As Chorale from the Easter cantata Christ lag in Todesbanden the arrangement 's score was copyrighted in 1950 and published by Broude Brothers . Later the arrangement was also recorded by José Serebrier and Robert Pikler .

= = Recent performances = =

In 2000 the cantata was performed at Eisenach , in the church where Bach was baptised , as part of the Monteverdi Choir 's Bach Cantata Pilgrimage (the live recording was released in 2007) . The Monteverdi Choir also performed the cantata in 2013 in the Royal Albert Hall . This performance , which had audience participation , was part of a nine @-@ hour " Bach marathon " .

The cantata was successfully staged by English Touring Opera in 2012 . It was paired with the opera The Emperor of Atlantis and arranged by Iain Farrington for the same instrumental forces as the opera (chamber ensemble including instruments not available to Bach such as saxophone) .