

= Bereitet die Wege , bereitet die Bahn , BWV 132 =

Bereitet die Wege , bereitet die Bahn ( Prepare the paths , prepare the road ) , BWV 132 , is a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach . He composed it in Weimar in 1715 for the fourth Sunday in Advent and led the first performance on 22 December 1715 .

Bach had taken up regular cantata composition a year before when he was promoted to concertmaster at the Weimar court , writing one cantata per month to be performed in the Schlosskirche , the court chapel in the ducal Schloss . Bereitet die Wege , bereitet die Bahn was his first cantata for the fourth Sunday in Advent . The libretto by the court poet Salomo Franck is related to the day 's prescribed gospel reading , the testimony of John the Baptist . Franck derives from it thoughts about baptism as a preparation of the individual Christian who is addressed as a limb of Christ .

Bach structured the music in six movements of alternating arias and recitatives , and scored it for a small ensemble of four vocal parts , oboe , strings and continuo . The voices are combined only in the closing chorale , the fifth stanza of Elisabeth Cruciger 's hymn " Herr Christ , der einig Gotts Sohn " . The music of the chorale , which was possibly on a different sheet , is lost but can be replaced by a setting of the same stanza in a different cantata . In his composition , Bach follows Franck 's Baroque imagery closely , illustrating for example the baptismal water .

= = History and words = =

On 2 March 1714 Bach was appointed concertmaster of the Weimar court capelle of the co @-@ reigning dukes Wilhelm Ernst and Ernst August of Saxe @-@ Weimar . As concertmaster , he assumed the principal responsibility for composing new works , specifically cantatas for the Schlosskirche ( palace church ) , on a monthly schedule . He wrote this cantata for the fourth Sunday in Advent , dating it himself .

The prescribed readings for the Sunday were from the Epistle to the Philippians , " Rejoice in the Lord alway " ( Philippians 4 : 4 ? 7 ) , and from the Gospel of John , the testimony of John the Baptist ( John 1 : 19 ? 28 ) . The cantata text was written by the court poet Salomon Franck , published in the collection Evangelisches Andachts @-@ Opffer in 1715 . He included the fifth stanza of Elisabeth Cruciger hymn " Herr Christ , der einig Gotts Sohn " ( 1524 ) . Franck paraphrases in the first aria the passage from the Book of Isaiah which is quoted in the prescribed gospel , " Bereitet dem Herrn den Weg " ( Prepare the path for the Lord , Isaiah 40 : 3 ? 4 ) . The same passage from Isaiah appears in the beginning of Handel 's Messiah . Franck also refers to the baptism as a way of preparation . The individual Christian is addressed as a limb of Christ .

Bach led the first performance of the cantata on 22 December 1715 in the ducal chapel . He could not revive the work in Leipzig because tempus clausum was observed there during Advent .

The cantata was first published in 1881 in the Bach Gesellschaft edition , edited by Wilhelm Rust .

= = Structure and scoring = =

Bach structured the cantata in six movements , alternating arias and recitatives , concluded by a chorale . As in several other cantatas on words by Franck , it is scored for a small ensemble of four vocal soloists ( soprano ( S ) , alto ( A ) , tenor ( T ) and bass ( B ) ) , oboe ( Ob ) , two violins ( VI ) , viola ( Va ) , cello ( Vc ) and basso continuo ( Bc ) including bassoon . A choir is only needed for the chorale , if at all . The title of the autograph score reads : " Dominica 4 Adventus Xsti Concerto . / Bereitet die Wege , bereitet die Bahn . / â 9 . / 1 Hautbois . / 2 Violini / 1 Viola / Violoncello . / S : A : T : B : / col Bassp per l 'Organo / di / GSBach " . The duration is given as 22 minutes . The music of the chorale is lost ; it may have been noted in a simple setting on a separate sheet , as in the similar case of Nur jedem das Seine , BWV 163 , composed four weeks earlier . For practical purposes the same verse , closing Ihr , die ihr euch von Christo nennet , BWV 164 , in 1725 , may be used .

In the following table of the movements , the scoring follows the Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe , and the abbreviations for voices and instruments the list of Bach cantatas . The keys and time signatures

are taken from the Bach scholar Alfred Dürr , using the symbol for common time ( 4 / 4 ) . The instruments are shown separately for winds and strings , while the continuo , playing throughout , is not shown .

= = Music = =

= = = 1 = = =

The first aria , " Bereitet die Wege , bereitet die Bahn ! " ( Prepare the paths , prepare the road ! ) , is in da capo form in a 6 / 8 time signature , accompanied by the full ensemble . The soprano renders her calls to prepare the ways in melismas of several measures of semiquavers . John Eliot Gardiner , who conducted the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage in 2000 , describes the character of the movement of " insouciant grace and fleet @-@ footed buoyancy befitting a slowish gigue or a French loure . " The oboe adds virtuoso figuration and trills , reminiscent of Bach 's secular music . The aria is concluded by rejoicing calls : " Messias kömmt an " ( The Messiah arrives ) .

= = = 2 = = =

The tenor recitative , " Wer bist du ? Frage dein Gewissen " ( Who are you ? Ask your conscience ) , contains extended arioso passages , to stress " der Christen Kron und Ehre " ( the Christians ' crown and glory ) and " Wälz ab die schweren Sündensteine " ( back the heavy stones of sin ) . The voice and the continuo are at times set in imitation , an image for the Nachfolge ( following ) , as they go together to express the unity achieved , on the words " daß er mit dir im Glauben sich vereine " ( so that He may unite Himself to you in faith ) .

= = = 3 = = =

In the bass aria , " Wer bist du ? Frage dein Gewissen " ( Who are you ? Ask your conscience ) , the question " Wer bist du ? " ( Who are you ? ) , posed by the priests to St. John in the gospel , is given to the bass as the vox Christi , as if Jesus asked the listener this question . The cello often plays a " concertante role " . Its first motif expresses the question and is repeated throughout the movement , and the vocal line is derived from it .

= = = 4 = = =

The expressive declamation of the alto recitative , " Ich will , mein Gott , dir frei heraus bekennen " ( I would freely confess to You , my God ) , is highlighted by chords in the strings .

= = = 5 = = =

A solo violin accents the alto aria , " Christi Glieder , ach bedenket " ( Christ 's members , ah , consider ) , possibly inspired by the words " Christus gab zum neuen Kleide roten Purpur , weiße Seide " ( Christ gave as new garments crimson robes , white silk ) . Gardiner interprets it as " the cleansing effect of baptismal water " . The musicologist Julian Mincham supports that , stating : " Bach seldom neglects opportunities of creating musical images of cleansing water when mention is made of the act of baptism . This is the starting point of his invention of the violin obbligato melody " .

= = = 6 = = =

The four @-@ part setting of the closing chorale , " Ertöt uns durch deine Güte " ( Mortify us through Your goodness ) , is lost , but can be taken from Ihr , die ihr euch von Christo nennet , BWV

164 , transposed to A major .

= = Selected recordings = =

The listing is taken from the selection on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Choirs are roughly marked as large ( by red background ) or one voice per part ( OVPP ) ( by green background ) ; a large orchestra is highlighted red , while instrumental groups playing period instruments in historically informed performances are highlighted green under the header Instr ..