

= Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern , BWV 1 =

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern ( How beautifully the morning star shines ) , BWV 1 , is a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach . He composed it in 1725 in Leipzig for the feast of the Annunciation and led the first performance on 25 March 1725 , which that year fell on Palm Sunday . It is a chorale cantata , based on Philipp Nicolai 's hymn " Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern " ( 1599 ) .

Bach was in his second year as Thomaskantor in Leipzig , where the feast was the only occasion during Lent when festive music was permitted . The theme of the hymn suits both the Annunciation and Palm Sunday , in a spirit of longing expectation of an arrival . An unknown poet retained , as in the other chorale cantatas of Bach 's second cantata cycle , the hymn 's first and last stanza unchanged , but paraphrased the themes of the inner stanzas to a sequence of alternating recitatives and arias . Bach scored the cantata for three vocal soloists , a four @-@ part choir and a Baroque instrumental ensemble of two horns , two oboes da caccia , two solo violins , strings and continuo . All instruments play in the opening festive chorale fantasia , while the soprano carries the hymn tune and the lower voices answer in counterpoint of instrumental motifs . An oboe da caccia accents the first aria , the solo violins and strings return in the second aria , and an independent horn part crowns the closing chorale .

The cantata was the last chorale cantata of the cycle , possibly because Bach lost a librettist who had inspired him . The work was chosen to open the first attempt to publish Bach 's complete works , a century after his death .

= = History and words = =

When Bach composed the cantata , he was in his second year as Thomaskantor ( director of church music ) in Leipzig . He had written during his first year a cycle of cantatas for the occasions of the liturgical year that began on the first Sunday after Trinity 1723 . In his second year he had composed a second annual cycle of cantatas that was planned to consist exclusively of chorale cantatas based on Lutheran hymns . Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern is based on Philipp Nicolai 's " Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern " ( 1599 ) . The hymn in seven stanzas was associated with Epiphany but also with the Annunciation .

The prescribed readings for the day are Isaiah 's prophecy of the birth of the Messiah ( Isaiah 7 : 10 ? 16 ) and from the Gospel of Luke , the angel Gabriel announcing the birth of Jesus ( Luke 1 : 26 ? 38 ) . The feast of the Annunciation fell on Palm Sunday in 1725 . The unknown librettist retained the first and the last stanza of the hymn , and paraphrased the other stanzas to recitatives and arias , using stanza 2 for the first recitative , stanza 3 for the first aria , stanza 4 and part of stanza 5 for the second recitative , and stanza 6 for the second aria . The hymn , expressing the longing for the arrival of the Saviour , can be connected to Jesus ' birth being announced to Mary . The theme of arrival was also fitting for Palm Sunday when the arrival of Jesus in Jerusalem is celebrated . The Bach scholar Alfred Dürr notes : " The librettist must be credited with the empathy he shows for that fervour which characterizes Nicolai 's poem and which has made his hymns into an enduring possession of the Protestant Church . " While the name of the librettist , a " poetically and theologically competent specialist " is not known , scholars have suggested Andreas Stübel ( 1653 ? 1725 ) , a former headmaster of the Thomasschule .

Bach led the first performance of the cantata on 25 March 1725 which was in that year both the Annunciation and Palm Sunday . Annunciation was the only occasion for festive music during Lent when Leipzig observed tempus clausum ( silent time ) . Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern turned out to be the last chorale cantata Bach composed in his second cantata cycle . If Stübel was the librettist , his death in January 1725 explains that Bach lacked a competent collaborator . The composer returned to other texts for the remaining liturgical time of Easter , Pentecost and Trinity . The completion of the cycle of chorale cantatas meant so much to him , that he included the early chorale cantata for Easter Christ lag in Todes Banden , BWV 4 , and added a few chorale cantatas for occasions that were missing .

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern was chosen by the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft to begin the first volume of Bach 's complete works , which the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft began in 1850 , a century after Bach 's death . It was later listed as BWV 1 in the Bach @-@ Werke @-@ Verzeichnis .

= = Scoring and structure = =

Bach structured the cantata in six movements . The text and tune of the hymn are kept in the outer choral movements , a chorale fantasia and a four @-@ part closing chorale , which frame a sequence of alternating recitatives and arias . Bach scored the work for three vocal soloists ( soprano ( S ) , tenor ( T ) and bass ( B ) ) , a four @-@ part choir , and a Baroque instrumental ensemble of two horns ( Co ) , two oboes da caccia ( Oc ) , two violins ( VI ) , two obbligato violins ( Vs ) , viola ( Va ) and basso continuo . A festive scoring like this , including brass , was usually performed on holidays . The duration of the cantata is given as 25 minutes .

In the following table of the movements , the scoring follows the Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe . The keys and time signatures are taken from Alfred Dürr , using the symbol for common time ( 4 / 4 ) . The continuo , playing throughout , is not shown .

= = Music = =

The scoring provides a rich orchestration , the sparkle of the morning star is illustrated by two solo violins , first in the first chorus , and reappearing with the other strings in the second aria . The sound of the oboe da caccia returns in the first aria . The horn sound returns in the closing chorale , with the second horn enriching the texture of the four @-@ part setting by an independent line . The scoring is reminiscent of Sie werden aus Saba alle kommen , BWV 65 , written for Epiphany . Bach would later use the pair of horns in Part IV of his Christmas Oratorio , dealing with the naming of Jesus as announced to Mary . These works are all set in F major , observed by the musicologist Julian Mincham to be a key of " personal and contemplative " joy , compared to the " rousing , communal , major , sharp @-@ key " joy of the opening chorus of the Christmas Oratorio , for example .

= = = 1 = = =

The cantus firmus , " Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern " ( How beautifully the morning star shines ) , in the chorale fantasia of the opening chorus is sung by the sopranos . The orchestra , with the two solo violins illustrating the sparkle of the morning star , plays indepently and festively . Bach achieves " unusual animation " by setting the hymn not in common time but 12 / 8 . John Eliot Gardiner who conducted the Bach Cantata Pilgrimage in 2000 , notes that movement begins intimately with a phrase of the second solo violin , answered by other instruments together and echoed individually , preparing the entrance of the soprano . The lower counter the cantus firmus by a version of the theme heard at the beginning in the solo violin . In further lines , the lower voices even enter first in their counterpoint , preparing the chorale tune entry . One phrase stands out as composed in chordal wwriting : " lieblich , freundlich " ( loving , friendly ) ,

= = = 2 = = =

The tenor expresses in secco recitative the belief " Du wahrer Gottes und Marien Sohn " ( You , very son of God and Mary ) .

= = = 3 = = =

In the first aria , the soprano renders " Erfüllet , ihr himmlischen göttlichen Flammen " ( Fill utterly , you divine celestial flames ) , accompanied by an obbligato oboe da caccia , an instrument in alto range . The instruments illustrates in coloraturas the celestial flames .

=== 4 ===

In another secco recitative , the bass contrasts " Ein irdscher Glanz , ein leiblich Licht rührt meine Seele nicht " ( An earthly flash , a corporeal light does not stir my soul ) with heavenly light , illustrated by a melisma on both " Freudenschein " ( joyful radiance ) and " Erquickung " ( refreshment ) .

=== 5 ===

The two solo violins return from the first movement , accompanying with the other strings the tenor in the second aria , an expression of thanks and praise , " Unser Mund und Ton der Saiten " ( Our mouths and the tones of strings ) . The song of praise is intensified by a dance @-@ like motion , called " graceful minuet pulse " by the Bach scholar Klaus Hofmann . The voice has to master coloraturas on the repeated word " Gesang " ( singing ) .

=== 6 ===

The closing chorale , " Wie bin ich doch so herzlich froh " ( How earnestly glad I am indeed ) , is embellished by an independent part of the second horn , while the other instruments double the voices . Thus , the last chorale cantata in the second cantata cycle reaches an " air of baroque festive splendour " .

== Selected recordings ==

The selection is taken from the listing by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Choirs and orchestras are roughly marked as large by red background ; green background indicates vocalists with one voice per part ( OVPP ) and instrumental groups playing period instruments in historically informed performances .