

= Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt , BWV 18 =

Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt (Just as the rain and snow fall from heaven) , BWV 18 , is an early church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach . He composed it in Weimar for the Sunday Sexagesimae , the second Sunday before Lent , likely by 1713 .

The cantata is based on a text by Erdmann Neumeister published in 1711 . It is one of Bach cantata texts of the Weimar period not written by the court poet Salomon Franck . The text cites Isaiah , related to the gospel , the parable of the Sower . The third movement is in the style of a sermon , combined with a litany by Martin Luther . The closing chorale is the eighth stanza of Lazarus Spengler 's hymn " Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt " .

The cantata falls relatively early in Bach 's chronology of cantata compositions . It was possibly composed for 24 February 1715 , but more likely a year or even two earlier . Bach structured the work in five movements , a sinfonia , a recitative , a recitative with chorale , an aria and a closing chorale . He scored it for three vocal soloists , a four @-@ partchoir only in the chorale , and an unusual Baroque instrumental ensemble of four violas , cello , bassoon and basso continuo . When he performed the work again as Thomaskantor in Leipzig , he added two recorders to double viola I and II an octave higher .

= = History and words = =

Bach worked for the court in Weimar from 1708 . 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 . Bach composed this cantata for the second Sunday before Ash Wednesday , called Sexagesima . The prescribed readings for the Sunday were taken from the Second Epistle to the Corinthians , " God 's power is mighty in the weak " (2 Corinthians 11 : 19 ? 12 : 9) , and from the Gospel of Luke , the parable of the Sower (Luke 8 : 4 ? 15) .

The cantata is based on a text by Erdmann Neumeister written for the Eisenach court and published in Gotha in 1711 in the collection Geistliches Singen und Spielen (Sacred singing and playing) , which had been set to music by Georg Philipp Telemann . It is one of few texts set to music in Weimar which were not written not by the court poet Salomon Franck . The text cites Isaiah in the second movement , " For as the rain cometh down , and the snow from heaven , ? So shall my word be ... " (Isaiah 55 : 10 ? 11) , related to the Gospel about God 's word compared to seed . In the third movement , the poet combines warnings of the dangers to God 's word in the style of a sermon with four lines of prayer from a litany by Martin Luther . The closing chorale is the eighth stanza of Lazarus Spengler 's hymn " Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt " (1524) .

The cantata falls relatively early in Bach 's chronology of cantata compositions . It was possibly composed for 24 February 1715 , but more likely a year or two earlier . The Bach scholar Christoph Wolff states : " The original performing material has survived and allows us to date the work to 1713 " . Bach performed the cantata again when he was Thomaskantor in Leipzig in 1724 , with an expanded scoring in a different key . It was then probably performed in the same service as the newly composed Leichtgesinnte Flattergeister , BWV 181 .

= = Scoring and structure = =

Bach structured the cantata in five movements , an instrumental sinfonia , a recitative , a recitative with chorale , an aria and a closing chorale . He scored the work , like other cantatas written in Weimar , for a small ensemble of three vocal soloists (soprano (S) , tenor (T) , bass (B)) , a four @-@ part choir only in the chorales , and a Baroque instrumental ensemble of four violas (Va) , cello (Vc) , bassoon (Fg) and basso continuo . The setting for four violas is unusual . In a similar orchestration , the Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 also omits violins .

The second version of this cantata for a performance in Leipzig adds two recorders , which double

viola I and II an octave higher . John Eliot Gardiner compares the effect to a four @-@ foot stop on a pipe organ . The cantata begins in G minor in the Weimar version , in A minor in the Leipzig version . In the following table of the movements , the scoring and keys follow the Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe for the Leipzig version . The time signatures are taken from the book on all cantatas by the Bach scholar Alfred Dürr , using the symbol for common time (4 / 4) . The continuo , played throughout , is not shown .

= = Music = =

The keys in this section refer to the Weimar version , although the recording by Masaaki Suzuki , with commentary by Klaus Hofmann , uses the Leipzig keys . Hofmann notes the work 's " Lutheran character " , quoting Luther 's litany inserted in the third movement , and sees it as a " recitative study " , exploring the secco recitative of the Italian opera , introduced by Erdmann Neumeister , and also the accompagnato with rich instrumental accompaniment . Gardiner finds all three cantatas for the occasion , dealing with God 's word , " characterised by his vivid pictorial imagination , an arresting sense of drama , and by music of freshness and power that lodges in the memory " .

= = = 1 = = =

The cantata opens with a sinfonia in G minor , which illustrates falling rain and snow in descending phrases . In da capo form , is reminiscent both of a chaconne and a concerto . The four violas and continuo , with bassoon and cello parts specified , create an unusual sound , termed " magically dark @-@ hued sonority " by Gardiner .

= = = 2 = = =

The quotation from Isaiah , " Gleichwie der Regen und Schnee vom Himmel fällt und nicht wieder dahin kommet " (ust as the rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return again to it) , is sung by the bass , the vox Christi (voice of Christ) , in a secco recitative . This is Bach 's first adaptation of recitative in a church cantata , not following operatic patterns , but " a lucid presentation of the text in a dignified , highly personal style " .

= = = 3 = = =

The central movement , " Mein Gott , hier wird mein Herze sein " (My soul ? s treasure is God ? s word) , is unique in Bach 's cantatas , the choir soprano interrupts the prayer of the male soloists four times , followed by a conclusion of the full choir " Erhör uns , lieber Herre Gott ! " (Hear us , dear Lord God !) . The recitatives are marked adagio in E @-@ flat major , while the interspersed litany is presented dramatically (allegro in C minor) . Gardiner compares the imagery of the recitatives : " all adds up to a vivid , Brueghel @-@ like portrayal of rural society at work ? the sower , the glutton , the lurking devil , as well as those pantomime villains , the Turks and the Papists . He compares the movement to Telemann 's setting of the same text and states :

On the other hand here is Bach , seeming to relish the contrast between archaic litany and his new ' modern ' recitative style in which he empowers his two male soloists to voice personal pleas for faith and resolution in the face of multiple provocation [s] and devilish guile , with increasingly virtuosic displays of coloratura , ever @-@ wider modulations and extravagant word @-@ painting on ' berauben ' (to rob) , ' Verfolgung ' (persecution) and ' irregehen ' (to wander off course) .

= = = 4 = = =

The only aria , " Mein Seelenschatz ist Gottes Wort " (My soul ? s treasure is God ? s word) , is set for soprano , accompanied by the four violas in unison .

=== 5 ===

The cantata closes with a four @-@ part setting of Spengler 's hymn stanza , " Ich bitt , o Herr , aus Herzens Grund " (I pray , o Lord , from the bottom of my heart) , It is Bach 's first of many to come as the typical conclusion of his cantatas .

= = Selected recordings = =

The selection is taken from the listing provided on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . 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) .