

= O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad , BWV 165 =

O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad ( O holy bath of Spirit and water ) , BWV 165 , is a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach . He composed it in Weimar for Trinity Sunday and led the first performance on 16 June 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 . O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad was his first cantata for Trinity Sunday , the feast day marking the end of the first half of the liturgical year . The libretto by the court poet Salomo Franck is based on the day 's prescribed gospel reading about the meeting of Jesus and Nicodemus . It is close in content to the gospel and connects the concept of the Trinity to baptism .

The music is structured in six movements , alternating arias and recitatives , and scored for a small ensemble of four vocal parts , strings and continuo . The voices are combined only in the closing chorale , the fifth stanza of Ludwig Helmbold 's hymn " Nun laßt uns Gott dem Herren " , which mentions scripture , baptism and the Eucharist , in a summary of the cantata 's topic . Based on the text full of Baroque imagery , Bach composed a sermon in music , especially in the two recitatives for the bass voice , and achieved contrasts in expression . He led the first performance , and probably another on the Trinity Sunday concluding his first year as Thomaskantor in Leipzig on 4 June 1724 .

= = Background = =

On 2 March 1714 Bach was appointed Konzertmeister ( concert master ) of the Weimar Hofkapelle ( court chapel ) of the co @-@ reigning dukes Wilhelm Ernst and Ernst August of Saxe @-@ Weimar . The position was created for him , possibly on his demand , giving him " a newly defined rank order " according to Christoph Wolff .

From 1695 , an arrangement shared the responsibility for church music at the Schlosskirche ( court church ) between the Kapellmeister Samuel Drese and the Vize @-@ Kapellmeister Georg Christoph Strattner , who took care of one Sunday per month while the Kapellmeister served on three Sundays . The pattern probably continued from 1704 , when Strattner was succeeded by Drese 's son Johann Wilhelm . When Konzertmeister Bach also assumed the principal responsibility for one cantata a month , the Kapellmeister 's workload was further reduced to two Sundays per month .

The performance venue on the third tier of the court church , in German called Himmelsburg ( Heaven 's Castle ) , has been described by Wolff as " congenial and intimate " , calling for a small ensemble of singers and players . Performers of the cantatas were mainly the core group of the Hofkapelle , formed by seven singers , three leaders and five other instrumentalists . Additional players of the military band were available when needed , and also town musicians and singers of the gymnasium . Bach as the concertmaster probably led the performances as the first violinist , while the organ part was played by Bach 's students such as Johann Martin Schubart and Johann Caspar Vogler . Even in settings like chamber music , Bach requested a strong continuo section with cello , bassoon and violone in addition to the keyboard instrument .

= = = Monthly cantatas from 1714 to 1715 = = =

While Bach had composed vocal music only for special occasions until his promotion , the regular chance to compose and perform a new work resulted in a program into which Bach " threw himself wholeheartedly " , as Christoph Wolff notes . In his first cantata of the series , Himmelskönig , sei willkommen , BWV 182 , for the double feast of Palm Sunday and Annunciation , he showed his skill in an elaborate work in eight movements , for four vocal parts and at times ten @-@ part instrumental writing , and presenting himself as a violin soloist .

The following table of works performed by Bach as concertmaster between 1714 and the end of

1715 is based on tables by Wolff and Alfred Dürr . According to Dürr , O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad is the eleventh cantata composition of this period . The works contain arias and recitatives , as in contemporary opera , while earlier cantatas had concentrated on biblical text and chorale . Some works , such as Widerstehe doch der Sünde , may have been composed earlier .

= = Topic and text = =

= = = Trinity Sunday = = =

Bach composed O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad for Trinity Sunday , the Sunday concluding the first half of the liturgical year . The prescribed readings for the day were from the Epistle to the Romans , " What depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God " ( Romans 11 : 33 ? 36 ) , and from the Gospel of John , the meeting of Jesus and Nicodemus ( John 3 : 1 ? 15 ) .

In Leipzig , Bach composed two more cantatas for the occasion which focused on different aspects of the readings , Höchsterwünschtes Freudenfest , BWV 194 , first composed for the inauguration of church and organ in Störmthal on 2 November 1723 , Es ist ein trotzig und verzagt Ding , BWV 176 ( 1725 ) and the chorale cantata Gelobet sei der Herr , mein Gott , BWV 129 ( 1726 ) . Scholars debate if Bach performed on Trinity Sunday of 1724 , which fell on 4 June , Höchsterwünschtes Freudenfest or O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad or both .

= = = Cantata text = = =

The libretto was written by the court poet , Salomon Franck , and published in Evangelisches Andachts @-@ Opffer in 1715 . The opening refers to Jesus ' words in John 3 : 5 : " Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit , he cannot enter into the kingdom of God . " ( John 3 : 5 ) The second movement , a recitative , reflects upon birth in the Spirit as baptism through God 's grace : " Er wird im Geist und Wasserbade ein Kind der Seligkeit und Gnade " ( In the bath of spirit and water he becomes a child of blessedness and grace ) . Movement 3 , an aria for alto , considers that the bond has to be renewed throughout life , because it will be broken by man , reflected in movement 4 . The last aria is a prayer for the insight that the death of Jesus brought salvation , termed " Todes Tod " ( death 's death ) . The cantata concludes with the fifth stanza of Ludwig Helmbold 's hymn of 1575 , " Nun laßt uns Gott dem Herren " , mentioning scripture , baptism and the Eucharist . Bach used the eighth and final stanza , " Erhalt uns in der Wahrheit " ( Keep us in the truth ) , to conclude his cantata Gott der Herr ist Sonn und Schild , BWV 79 .

Salomon expresses his thought in Baroque style rich in imagery . The image of the serpent is used in several meanings : as the serpent which seduced Adam and Eve to sin in paradise , as the symbol which Moses erected in the desert , and related to the gospel 's verse 14 : " And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness , even so must the Son of man be lifted up " .

= = Performance and publication = =

Bach led the first performance of the cantata on 16 June 1715 . The performance material for Weimar is lost . Bach performed the work again as Thomaskantor in Leipzig . Extant performance material was prepared by his assistant Johann Christian Köpping . The first possible revival is the Trinity Sunday of Bach 's first year in office , 4 June 1724 , also the conclusion of his first year and first Leipzig cantata cycle , because he had assumed the office on the first Sunday after Trinity the year before . Bach made presumably minor changes .

The cantata was published in the Bach @-@ Ausgabe , the first edition of Bach 's complete works by the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft , in 1887 in volume 33 , edited by Franz Wüllner . In the second edition of the complete works , the Neue Bach @-@ Ausgabe , it appeared in 1967 , edited by Dürr , with a Kritischer Bericht ( Critical report ) following in 1968 .

= = Music = =

= = = Scoring and structure = = =

The title on the copy by Johann Christian Köpping is : " Concerto a 2 Violi : 1 Viola . Fagotto Violoncello S.A.T.e Basso e Continuo / di Joh : Seb : Bach " ( Concerto for 2 violins , 1 viola . Bassoon Cello S.A.T and Bass and Continuo / by Joh : Seb : Bach ) . The cantata in six movements is scored like chamber music for four vocal soloists ( soprano , alto , tenor and bass ) , a four @-@ part choir ( SATB ) in the closing chorale , two violins ( VI ) , viola ( Va ) , bassoon ( Fg ) , cello ( Vc ) and basso continuo ( Bc ) . The bassoon is called for , but has no independent part . The duration is given as about 15 minutes .

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 .

= = = Movements = = =

The cantata consists of solo movements closed by a four @-@ part chorale . Arias alternate with two recitatives , both sung by the bass . John Eliot Gardiner summarizes : " It is a true sermon in music , based on the Gospel account of Jesus ' night @-@ time conversation with Nicodemus on the subject of ' new life ' , emphasising the spiritual importance of baptism . " He points out the many musical images of water .

= = = = 1 = = = =

In the first aria , " O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad " ( O bath of Holy Spirit and of water ) , the ritornello is a fugue , whereas in the five vocal sections the soprano and violin I are a duo in imitation on the same material . These sections are composed in symmetry , A B C B ' A ' . The theme of B involves an inversion of material from A , that of C is derived from measure 2 of the ritornello . Dürr writes :

The prominent use made of formal schemes based on the principles of symmetry and inversion is in all probability intentional , serving as a symbol of the inner inversion of mankind ? his rebirth in baptism .

= = = = 2 = = = =

The first recitative , " Die sündige Geburt verdammter Adamserben " ( The sinful birth of the cursed heirs of Adam ) , is secco , but several phrases are close to an arioso . The musicologist Julian Mincham notes that Bach follows the meaning of the text closely , for example by " rhythmic dislocations for death and destruction " , a change in harmony on " poisoned " , and " the complete change of mood at the mention of the blessed Christian " . He summarizes : " Here anger and resentment at Man ? s inheritance of suppurating sin is contrasted against the peace and joy of God @-@ given salvation " .

= = = = 3 = = = =

The second aria , " Jesu , der aus großer Liebe " ( Jesus , who out of great love ) , accompanied by the continuo , is dominated by an expressive motif with several upward leaps of sixths , which is introduced in the ritornello and picked up by the alto voice in four sections . Mincham notes that " the mood is serious and reflective but also purposeful and quietly resolute " .

===== 4 =====

The second recitative , " Ich habe ja , mein Seelenbräutigam " ( I have indeed , o bridegroom of my soul ) , is accompanied by the strings ( *accompagnato* ) , marked by Bach " *Rec : con Stroment* " ( Recitative : with instruments ) . The German musicologist Klaus Hofmann notes that the text turns to mysticism , reflecting the Bridegroom , Lamb of God and the serpent in its double meaning . The text is intensified by several melismas , a marking " *adagio* " on the words " *hochheiliges Gotteslamm* " ( most holy Lamb of God ) , and by melodic parts for the instruments . Gardiner notes that Bach has images for the serpent displayed in the desert by Moses , and has the accompaniment fade away on the last line " *wenn alle Kraft vergehet* " ( when all my strength has faded ) .

===== 5 =====

The last aria , " Jesu , meines Todes Tod " ( Jesus , death of my death ) , is set for tenor , accompanied by the violins in unison , marked " *Aria Violini unisoni e Tenore* " . The image of the serpent appears again , described by the composer and musicologist William G. Whittaker : " the whole of the obbligato for violins in unison is constructed out of the image of the bending , writhing , twisting reptile , usually a symbol of horror , but in Bach 's musical speech a thing of pellucid beauty " .

===== 6 =====

The cantata closes with a four @-@ part setting of the chorale stanza , *Sein Wort , sein Tauf , sein Nachtmahl* ( His word , His baptism , His communion ) . The text in four short lines summarizes that Jesus helps any in need by his words , his baptism and his communion , and ends in the prayer that the Holy Spirit may teach to faithfully trust in this .

The hymn tune by Nikolaus Selnecker was first published in Leipzig in 1587 in the hymnal *Christliche Psalmen , Lieder vnd Kirchengesenge* ( Christian psalms , songs and church chants ) . Bach marked the movement : " *Chorale . Stromenti concordant* " , indicating that the instruments play *colla parte* with the voices .

== Selected recordings ==

The recordings are provided by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . Choirs and orchestras are roughly grouped :

Large choirs ( red background ) : Boys ( choir of all male voices )

Medium @-@ size choirs , such as Chamber , Chorale ( choir dedicated mostly to church music ) , Motet

Large orchestras ( red background ) : Symphony

Chamber orchestra

Orchestra on period instruments ( green background )