

= Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam , BWV 7 =

Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam (Christ our Lord came to the Jordan) , BWV 7 , is a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach . He composed it in Leipzig for the Feast of St. John the Baptist and led its first performance on 24 June 1724 .

It is the third cantata Bach composed for his chorale cantata cycle , the second cycle he started after being appointed Thomaskantor in 1723 . The cantata is based on the seven stanzas of Martin Luther 's hymn " Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam " , about baptism . The first and last stanza of the chorale were used for the outer movements of the cantata , while an unknown librettist paraphrased the inner stanzas of the hymn into the text for the five other movements . The first movement , a chorale fantasia , is followed by a succession of arias alternating with recitatives , leading to a four @-@ part closing chorale .

The cantata is scored for three vocal soloists (alto , tenor and bass) , a four @-@ part choir , two oboes d 'amore , two solo violins , strings and basso continuo .

= = History and words = =

Bach composed this cantata for St John 's Day 24 June 1724 in Leipzig , as the third cantata of his second annual cycle (the chorale cantata cycle) , which had begun about two weeks earlier on the first Sunday after Trinity . The cycle was devoted to Lutheran hymns , typically rendered by keeping their text of the first and last stanza , while a contemporary poet reworded the inner stanzas .

The prescribed readings for the feast of the birth of John the Baptist were from the Book of Isaiah , " the voice of a preacher in the desert " (Isaiah 40 : 1 ? 5) , and from the Gospel of Luke , the birth of John the Baptist and the Benedictus of Zechariah (Luke 1 : 57 ? 80) . Martin Luther 's hymn " Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam " (To Jordan came our Lord the Christ) is associated with the feast . Its topic , differing from that of the readings , is baptism , which is treated based on biblical accounts , starting from Christ 's baptism by John the Baptist in the river Jordan . The hymn tune is " Es woll [t] uns Gott genädig sein " , Zahn No. 7246 .

Bach used the text of the first stanza of Luther 's hymn for the first movement of his cantata , with its chorale melody sung as cantus firmus . The final movement of the cantata is a four @-@ part chorale setting of the seventh stanza , on the hymn tune . The five arias and recitatives between these choral movements are settings of text paraphrased from the hymn 's other stanzas .

= = Scoring and structure = =

The cantata in seven movements is scored for three vocal soloists (alto (A) , tenor (T) and bass (B)) , a four @-@ part choir (SATB) , two oboes d 'amore (Oa) , two solo violins (Vs , the second one only introduced in a later performance) , two violins (VI) , viola (Va) and basso continuo (Bc) .

= = Music = =

The seven @-@ movement cantata begins with a chorale fantasia and ends , after a sequence of alternating arias and recitatives , with a closing chorale as a four @-@ part setting . Bach increased the number of accompanying instruments for the arias , from only continuo in the second movement , over two solo violins in the central movement of the cantata , to two oboes d 'amore and strings in the sixth movement .

= = = 1 = = =

In the opening chorus , " Christ unser Herr zum Jordan kam " (Christ our Lord came to the Jordan) , the tenor has the melody as a cantus firmus , while the other voices sing free counterpoint . In the first cantata of the chorale cantata cycle , O Ewigkeit , du Donnerwort , BWV 20 , Bach had given

the cantus firmus of the chorale tune to the soprano , and in the second , Ach Gott , vom Himmel sieh darein , BWV 2 , to the alto .

The opening chorus resembles an Italian violin concerto . The musicologist Julian Mincham likens the " solo violin 's persistent , rocking , wave @-@ like idea " to the waves of the Jordan River . Alfred Dürr compares the vocal sections , all with the solo violin , to the solo sections of a violin concerto , as opposed to the tutti sections with the orchestra . John Eliot Gardiner interprets the movement as a French overture , " replete with grandiloquent baroque gestures to suggest both the processional entrance of Jesus and the powerful flooding of the River Jordan " . Klaus Hofmann notes that the movement combines the old style of motet writing with the new type of solo concerto , and observes that " the main violin solo episodes ... are at first linked to the choral entries , but gradually assume larger proportions and greater independence as the movement progresses " .

== 2 ==

The first aria , " Merkt und hört , ihr Menschenkinder " (Mark and hear , you humans) , is accompanied by the continuo alone . Mincham observes that a characteristic fast motif of five notes , repeated abundantly in the cello , always flows downward , while Bach usually also inverts motifs , such as in his Inventions . Mincham concludes that it represents the " pouring of the baptismal waters " .

== 3 ==

The following recitative is given to the tenor as an Evangelist : " Dies hat Gott klar mit Worten " (This God has clearly provided with words) , narrating the biblical command to baptise .

== 4 ==

The central aria is sung by the tenor , accompanied by two violins , marked " solo " in a later performance , " Des Vaters Stimme ließ sich hören " (The Father 's voice can be heard) . Gardiner notes that the music " describes , through its pair of soaring violins , the circling flight of the Holy Spirit as a dove " . Hofmann notes the character of the movement as a gigue , and several appearances of the number 3 as a symbol of the Trinity : it is a trio for voice and two violins , " in triple time ? and markedly so : not only is the time signature 3 / 4 , but also the crotchets are each divided into triplets " , and in a form of three solo sections as " all variants of a single model that is presented in the opening and concluding ritornellos " . Hofmann concludes : " The sequence that this creates ? three different forms of the same musical substance ? is evidently to be understood as a symbol of the Holy Trinity . "

== 5 ==

A recitative for bass , the vox Christi (voice of Christ) , " Als Jesus dort nach seinen Leiden " (As Jesus there , after His passion) , speaks of Jesus after his passion and resurrection . It is accompanied by the strings , similar to the words of Jesus in Bach 's St Matthew Passion .

== 6 ==

The last aria is sung by the alto with rich accompaniment : " Menschen , glaubt doch dieser Gnade " (People , believe this grace now ,) . The two oboes d 'amore double the first violin when human beings are requested to accept the grace of God to not " perish in the pit of hell " .

== 7 ==

The closing chorale is the final stanza of the hymn , with the instruments playing colla parte : " Das

Aug allein das Wasser sieht " (The eye sees only water ,) , a summary of Luther 's teaching about baptism .

= = Editions = =

In 1851 , about a century before the cantata got its BWV number , it was published as No. 7 in the first volume of the Bach @-@ Gesellschaft @-@ Ausgabe . In the New Bach Edition the cantata was included in Series I , Volume 29 , Kantaten zum Johannisfest (Cantatas for St. John 's Day) . Calmus and Breitkopf & Härtel published performance scores . The Breitkopf score translates the cantata 's title as Lord Christ of old to Jordan came .

= = Selected recordings = =

A list of recordings is provided by Aryeh Oron on the Bach @-@ Cantatas website . The type of choir and orchestra is roughly shown as a large group by red background , and as an ensemble with period instruments in historically informed performance by green background .