

# J.S. Bach - Church Cantatas BWV 165

Form: Aria (S) - Recit (B) - Aria (A) - Recit (B) - Aria (T) - Chorale.

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NBA I/15; BC A90

Trinity Sunday (BWV 165, [194], 176, 129)

\*Romans 11:33-36 (O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!)

\*John 3:1-15 (Discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus: You must be born anew)

Librettist: Salomo Franck (see notes).

FP: presumably 16 June 1715 (Weimar Palace Chapel)

Performed again in Leipzig on 4 June 1724 (St. Thomas in the morning and St. Nicholas at afternoon Vespers). See note.

Instrumentation:

- Vln I, II
- Vla
- SATB
- Fagotto (no independent role)
- Violoncello
- Continuo

Form (Rhyme: ABBCDDA)

Fugal Exposition (mm. 1-9) GM

A. Lines 1-2 (mm. 9-13) GM-DM

Fugal Exp. (12[overlap]-18) DM

B (Inversion). Line 3 (18-25) DM-Em

Fugal Exp. (25-29) Em

C. Lines 4-5 (29-34) Em-Am

Fugal Exp. (33[overlap]-36) Am

B' (Inversion). Line 6 (36-41) Am-CM

Fugal Exp. (41-46) CM-GM

A'. Line 1 (45[overlap]-49) GM

Fugal Exp. (49-57) GM

Because the Gospel for Trinity Sunday recounts Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," theologians of Bach's day focused on Trinitarian baptism ("baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"). For Alfred Dürr's comments on the cantata, see note.

## J.S. Bach Cantata No. 165

### O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad

In the opening movement, the inflexibility of Jesus' statement is reflected in the fugal rigidity of the instrumental episodes, while the duality of Jesus' description ("baptism by water and Spirit") is depicted through imitation between singer and violin. The formal sequence of ascending subject - inversion - ascending subject - inversion may symbolize the act of baptism (lifting the water, then letting it pour down; more metaphorically, rebirth), while also serving to frame the central statement C, which summarizes the significance of "baptism by water and Spirit"—a "flood that drowns all iniquity through its miraculous power."

### Concerto.

(Aria.) **Tempo giusto** (♩ = 72.) • Baptism by Spirit & water brings us into kingdom (165/1).

**Soprano. A. Lines 1-2.**

O heiliges Geist- und Wasserbad, das

The fugue subject is presented imitatively by singer and Vln I.

Word painting: The flowing melismas and cross relations between F (which signals C major) followed shortly thereafter by F# (sliding the tonality back to G major) suggest the pliant waters of baptism. Imitation between singer and violin I reflects the duality of "baptism by water and Spirit," as referred in the text.

Got - tes - Reich uns ein - - ver - lei - bet,

Malcolm Boyd writes, "Each phrase is for the most part melodically independent of the others... and each one starts from a different key centre, but the whole is held together mainly by recurrent motifs from the fugal ritornello..." See *J. S. Bach. Oxford Composer Companions*, ed. Malcolm Boyd (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 331.

Musical score for measures 15-17. The system shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part features a complex texture with many sixteenth notes. Chords are indicated below the piano part: D7, G major, A7, and D major.

Musical score for measures 18-20. The vocal line includes the lyrics "und uns ins Buch des Le". A red line connects the word "und" to a specific melodic phrase in the piano accompaniment, labeled "B. Line 3 (Theme inverted)." and "Inverted". Another red line points to a melodic phrase in the piano part labeled "Word painting: Energetic melisma for '[Book of] Life.'" and "Vln I". The piano part has a dynamic marking of *p*. Chords are indicated below: D major, (D7), and G major.

Musical score for measures 21-23. The vocal line includes the lyrics "benschrei". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar texture. Chords are indicated below: E7, A minor, D7, G major, B7, E minor, and B7.

Musical score for measures 24-26. The vocal line includes the lyrics "bet, und uns ins Buch des Lebens schreibt!". A red box contains the text: "As is typical with Franck's librettos, the text alludes to various biblical passages (see note for examples)." The piano part features a "Fugal Exp." section. Annotations include "Vln I", "Vln II", and "mf Vla up 8va". Chords are indicated below: E minor and E minor.

Musical score for measures 27-29. The vocal line includes the lyrics "O Fluth, die al". A red line connects the word "Fluth" to a melodic phrase in the piano accompaniment, labeled "C. Lines 4-5 (Theme derived from m. 2)." and "Vln I". The piano part has a dynamic marking of *p*. Chords are indicated below: D7, G major, G7, C major, B major, E minor, and E7.

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Word painting: Neapolitan 6th inflection colors "Missetat" ("iniquity").

30

Rhetorical emphasis of "alle" (all) with melismas.

le, al - le **Mis - se -**

A minor D7 B7 F#7 B minor E7 A minor N6

32II

**that** durch ih - re Wun - der - kraft er - trän - ket,

Vln I

Fugal Exp.

Vla *mf*

E7 A minor A minor

35

B' Line 6 (Inversion of Theme).

Word painting: Long, energetic melisma for "[Book of Life]."

und uns - das neue - Le -

*p* Vln I responds with theme from C inverted.

A minor G7 C major

38

ben schen - ket, und uns das Le -

C major

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41  
ben schenket!

Fugal Exp.  
Vln II  
mf  
C major  
Vla  
E minor

43 II  
O heil' - ges

D7  
E minor  
A: Line 1.  
p  
D7  
G major

46  
Geist und Was - serbad, o heil'ges Geist - und Wasser.

Vln I  
tr  
G major

49  
bad!

Vln I  
Fugal Exp.  
mf  
Vln II  
Vla  
G major

52

Vln I  
D7 (E minor)  
D7 G major



55

G major

Secco  
**Recitativo.** • Baptism by water & Spirit heals us of sin's disease (165/2).

165/2. 1. **Basso.** A F# D# C B E G Tritone for "God's wrath."

Chromatic saturation in the vocal part in 11 mm.

The bass is often the voice of authority.

Die sün-di-ge Ge-burt verdammt Adams-erben ge-bietet Gottes

The recitative captures the great contrast between a universally inherited sinful nature deserving of God's wrath (death) and the imputed righteousness of Christ (put on like a garment in baptism).

A# B7 E minor

4 Zorn, den-Tod und das Ver-der-ben. Denn was vom Fleisch ge-

Extravagant word-painting colors "gebietet Gottes Zorn, den Tod und das Verderben" ("gives birth to God's wrath, death and perdition.")

F#7 A# dim.7 E# dim.7 B minor B minor

7 bo-ren ist, ist nichts als Fleisch, von Sünde an-ge-steckt, vergiftet und be-

Leap to dim. 7 chord for "poisoned."

D7 G major C# dim.7 A7

10 flecket. Wie se-lig ist ein-Christ! Er wird im Geist und Wasserbade ein Kind der

Bach's early recitatives often approach the style of arioso. See Dürr, *The Cantatas of J. S. Bach*, 373-374.

Contrast: Diatonic writing for "how blessed is a Christian."

D major G major G7 C major C7

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13

Se. ligkeit und Gnade, er ziehet Christum an und seiner Unschuld wei. sse —

F major G major C major E7

For the significance of C major, see note.

16

Seide, er wird mit Christi Blut, dem Ehren+Purpur. kleide, im Taufbad ange. than.

The text alludes to biblical passages such as Galatians 3:27: As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

8th notes in continuo for emphasis.

A minor A7 D minor E7 Am Dm Dm7 A minor EM

**Aria.** •Prayer: May my baptism's healing purpose ever be realized (165/3).

165/3. (Larghetto  $\text{♩} = 50$ )

Form (Rhyme: AABCCB)  
 (The end of each vocal section is inserted into a statement of the ritornello.)

Ritornello (mm. 1-3) Em  
 Lines 1-3 (3-7) Em-GM  
 Rit (7-8) Em  
 Lines 1-3 (8-11) Em-Bm  
 Rit (11-13) Bm  
 Lines 4-6 (13-17) Bm-F#m  
 Rit (17-18) F#m-DM  
 Lines 4-6 (18-23) DM-Em  
 Rit (23-25) Em

Ritornello derived from the vocal line. Continuo alone (right hand is editorial realization).

E minor The ritornello (a large leap followed by a undulating melody in a flowing 12/8 meter) informs the entire aria, appears to symbolize the healing waves of baptism, especially if practiced as immersion.

3 **Alto.**

Alto is often the voice of faith. See Martin Petzoldt, *Bach Kommentar* 2:110.

Je. su. der. aus grosser Lie. be in. der Tau. fe mir ver. schrie. ben Le. .

The vocal line is related to the continuo line and, in the course of the segment, inserted into it (*Vokaleinbau*).

Vocal insertion (*Vokaleinbau*)

E minor

5 II

ben, Heil und Se. ligkeit,

Ritornello

D7 G major G major B7

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8

Je - su, der - aus gro - sser Lie - be in - der Tau - fe mir - ver - schrieben Le - ben,

Vocal Insertion

E minor E minor F#7 B minor

10 II

Heil und Se - ligkeit,

Ritornello  
See full score.

mf

B minor

13

hilf, dass ich - mich des - sen freu - e - und den Le - bensbun - der -

NBA: Gnadensbund (covenant of grace) each time.

Vocal insertion

p

B minor A7 D major

15

neu - e in - der gan - zen Le - bens -

C#7 F# minor

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17

zeit, hilf, dass ich mich des - sen

Ritornello *mf*

F# minor A7 D major

Detailed description: This system covers measures 17 and 18. The vocal line begins with the lyrics 'zeit, hilf, dass ich mich des - sen'. The piano accompaniment features a 'Ritornello' section marked *mf*. The key signature is one sharp (F#). Chord annotations in red indicate F# minor at the start, A7 in measure 17, and D major at the end of measure 18.

19

freu - e und den Le - bensbund er -

Word painting: Ornamented melisma for "freue" ("rejoice").

*tr* *pp* Vocal insertion *cresc.*

D7 G major B7

Detailed description: This system covers measures 19 and 20. The vocal line has the lyrics 'freu - e und den Le - bensbund er -'. A 'Word painting: Ornamented melisma for "freue" ("rejoice")' is indicated above the first measure. The piano accompaniment includes trills (*tr*) and a *pp* dynamic. A 'Vocal insertion' is marked in red in measure 20, with a *cresc.* dynamic. Chord annotations in red show D7, G major, and B7.

21

neu - e in der gan - zen Le - bens.

*tr* *p* Vocal insertion

E minor

Detailed description: This system covers measures 21 and 22. The vocal line has the lyrics 'neu - e in der gan - zen Le - bens.'. The piano accompaniment features a trill (*tr*) and a *p* dynamic. A 'Vocal insertion' is marked in red in measure 22. The key signature changes to E minor, indicated by a red annotation.

23

zeit.

Ritornello *mf*

E minor E minor

Detailed description: This system covers measures 23 and 24. The vocal line has the lyrics 'zeit.'. The piano accompaniment features a 'Ritornello' section marked *mf*. The key signature remains E minor, indicated by red annotations at the beginning and end of the system.



Descriptions of Christ as bridegroom of the soul and as Lamb of God rooted in biblical such as the statements by John the Baptist: "I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full" (John 3:28-29); "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). See also John 1:36.

**Recitativo.** •Baptismal vows often broken, sanctification needed (165/4).

165/4.

**Basso.** ("con stroment" = with instruments)

"Soul's bridegroom" is emphasized with a flourish.

The melodic style of the movement flows between recitativo and arioso.

For Alfred Dürr's comments, see note.

1. **Ich habe ja, mein Seelen-bräu - tigam, da du mich neu ge.boren, dir**

Chords: B minor, A# dim.7, B minor, D major

Strings *p sempre*

The strings alternate between held chords ("halo" effect) and animated responses to the vocal line.

**Adagio.** (♩ = 50)

"Most holy Lamb of God" emphasized with an ornamented melisma accompanied by a motivally related violin I line in an adagio arioso.

**ewig-treu zu sein geschworen, hoch-heil' - - - ges Got - tes.**

Longer notes for "eternally."

Chords: G major

The motivically related Vln I part continues past the cadence, perhaps to indicate the transcendence referenced.

**lamm!** Doch hab'ich, ach! den Taufbund oft gebrochen und nicht erfüllt, was ich ver-

Exclamatio: Leap to express the dismay over personal sin ("breaking the baptismal covenant").

Chromatic harmonies express the dismay over personal sin ("breaking the baptismal covenant").

Chords: G major, B major, D# dim.7, E7, A7

Ornamented melisma for "erbarme" ("have mercy") preceded by an embellished violin I line, answered by animated strings on the word "Gnade" ("grace").

sprochen, er - bar - me dich aus Gna - den ü - ber mich. Vergieb mi die begang'ne

Heightened chromaticism for the plea for mercy.

Phrygian cadence, often used for a question.

Chromatic Saturation In the vocal part in 5 mm. (B7)

Chords: F#7, B minor, iv6, F# major, (B7)

**Sünde, du weisst, mein Gott, wie schmerzlich ich em - pfinde der alten Schlan - ge**

Scalar ascent, then drop of a seventh for "forgive the sins I've committed."

Tritone for "painfully."

Twisting melisma on a broken chord for "snake."

Chords: B7, E minor, C# dim.7, A7

The reference to "the ancient serpent and its venom" alludes to the doctrine of original sin—that the fall of Adam and Eve infected all future generations with a sinful nature. The reference to a "crucified serpent" alludes to Moses' bronze serpent, which foreshadowed the crucified Christ. See note for biblical passages.

16

D G#

Stich; das Sündengift verdirbt mir Leib und Seele, hilf, dass ich gläubig dich er-

Tritone for "sin's venom." NBA: verderbt

D minor (E7) G# dim.7 A minor G major

19

Tritone The image of Jesus as a snake substitute is set more diatonically than in m. 15. Tritones

wähle, blut-rothes Schlangenbild, das an dem Kreuz erhöhet, das alle Schmerzen

blood-red image of a snake, which on the cross has been raised

Rising vocal line, answered by Vln I for "raised on the cross"; tritones in the voice for "all sufferings."

G major G# dim.7

The day's Gospel reading includes Jesus' statement, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15).

Text painting: The strings sink downwards, stopping before completing the phrase to illustrate the text ("all strength vanishes")

22

22.

stillt und mich erquicket, wenn alle Kraft vergehet.

pp L. H. NBA: senza accompagnamento

A minor D7 G major G (without a chord)

The singer, apparently too tired to finish as he sings "wenn alle Kraft vergehet" ("when all strength fails"), "dies out" first, followed by the upper strings, leaving only the continuo to play the final bar. To emphasise the intended effect, Bach marks the upper strings of the penultimate bar pp, and the continuo part "senza accomp." so that the movement ends with a lone bass note played by the continuo. The long note with fermata allows for contemplation.

165/5. **Aria.** Bach devises a chain-like formal structure with walking bass for a text that develops a continuous line of thought.

- Form (Rhyme: ABABCD) CD
- Ritornello (mm. 1-8) GM
- A. Motto-Line 1 (9) GM
- Episode (10) GM
- Lines 1-2 (11-15) GM-DM
- A. Motto-Line 3 (16) DM
- Episode (17) GM
- Lines 3-4 (18-22) GM-DM
- B. Motto-Line 5 (23) DM
- Episode (24) EM
- Lines 5-6 (25-29) Am-Em
- B'. Motto-Line 7 (30) Em
- Episode (31) G7
- Lines 7-8 (32-36) CM-GM
- Ritornello GM

(Tempo giusto ♩ = 72.) • Prayer: Sanctify me till death; You conquered death & sin (165/5).

Vln I & II unison

Ritornello related to vocal theme.

G major Walking bass... A7 D major

For Alfred Dürr's comments, see note.

3 II

D major D7 G major

A sweet, spiraling melody points to Jesus' statement (already referenced in the previous movement): "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." See m. 23ff.

The idea of "one death devouring the other" is found in the central movement of Cantata 4.

**Tenore.**

Motto (Line 1)

Je - su, mei - nes To - des Tod, Je - su, mei - nes To - des Tod, Je - su, mei - nes To - des Tod,

Jesus, my death's death

Compare the chorale "Jesu, meines Lebens Leben, Jesu meines Todes Tod" by Christoph Homberg (1605-1681).

Lines 1-2 (Vokaleinbau)

Episode

G major

This "snake" is sweet, representing Christ.

11 II

mei - nes To - des Tod, mei - nes To - des Tod, mei - nes To - des Tod,

G7 A7

14

Tod, Je - su, mei - nes To - des Tod, — lass in mei - nem Le - ben und in

Motto (Line 3)

D major

16 II

mei - ner letz - ten Noth, und in mei - ner letz - ten

Episode

Lines 3-4 (Vokaleinbau)

G major

19

Noth, und in meiner letzten Noth, und in meiner letzten Noth, und in

G7 A7 D major

21II

meiner letzten Noth — mir für Au - gen schwe - ben, dass du mein Heilschlänglein

(vor) (Er lö ser)

that you my little-snake-of-salvation

D major G major A minor E7

Motto (Line 5)

24

seist, are, dass du mein Heilschlänglein seist vor das

(Er lö ser) (von dem)

mf p

A minor A minor A minor

Episode

Lines 5-6

(Vokaleinbau)

26II

Gift — der Sün.de, vor das Gift der Sün.de, dass du mein Heil.

(von dem) (Er)

A7 D minor B7 E major A minor



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29

lö ser) (von dem) schlängelein seist vor das Gift der Sün - de. Hei - le, Je - su, Seel' und Geist,

Motto (Line 7)

Episode

*mf*

D# dim.7  
E minor

E minor

G7 C major

Word painting:  
Leaping  
melismas  
for "Leben"  
("life").

31 II

(Vokaleinbau)

Lines 7-8

hei - le, Je - su, Seel' und Geist, dass - ich Le - - ben

*p*

C major

C major

C7

34

fin - de, dass - ich Le - - ben fin - de, hei - le, Je - su,

F major

D7

G major

G7

C major

36

Seel' und Geist, dass ich Le - ben fin - de.

Ritornello

*mf*

D7

G major

A7

38 II

B minor

A7

D major

D major

D7

41 G major G major G7

43 C major D7 G major

This is the 5th stanza of 8 in the 1575 chorale "Nun laßt uns Gott dem Herrn" by Ludwig Helmbold (1532-1598).  
 165/6. **Choral.** (Mel.: "Wach auf, mein Herz, und singe.") •Baptism, Word, and Eucharist guard us from evil (165/6).

Soprano. 1.  
 +Vln I Sein Wort, sein' Tau fe, sein Nachtmahl dient wi - der al - len Un - fall, der  
 +Vln II  
 +Vla Alto. Sein Wort, sein' Tau fe, sein Nachtmahl dient wi - der al - len Un - fall, der  
 +Fagotto Tenore. Sein Wort, sein' Tau fe, sein Nachtmahl dient wi - der al - len Un - fall, der  
 Basso. Sein Wort, sein' Tau fe, sein Nachtmahl dient wi - der al - len Un - fall, der

G major G major F#7 B minor D major B major

While "Unfall" can mean any accident or calamity, here it becomes a keyword for the entire cantata, encompassing all of the adverse consequences of the Fall, (resulting in a universally inherited sinful nature). Meanwhile, baptism appears to be represented here with flowing eighth notes.

Martin Petzold suggests that this setting appears to use a Thuringian melodic version. See *Bach Kommentar* 2:1067. By contrast, Bach sets the tune in triple meter in 194/12 and 79/6.

5  
 heil' ge Geist im Glau - ben lehrt uns da - rauf ver - trau - - en.  
 heil' ge Geist im Glau - ben lehrt uns da - rauf ver - trau - - en.  
 heil' ge Geist im Glau - ben lehrt uns da - rauf ver - trau - - en.  
 heil' ge Geist im Glau - ben lehrt uns da - rauf ver - trau - - en.

E minor G major A7 D major B7 C major G major G major