

“Wer da gläubet und getauft wird” BWV 37

1. *Wer da gläubet und getauft wird, der wird selig werden.*¹

2. Der Glaube ist das Pfand der Liebe,
Die Jesus für die Seinen hegt.
Drum hat er bloss aus Liebestriebe,
Da er ins Lebensbuch mich schriebe,
Mir dieses Kleinod beigelegt.

**3. Herr Gott Vater, mein starker Held!
Du hast mich ewig vor der Welt
In deinem Sohn geliebet.
Dein Sohn hat mich ihm selbst vertraut,⁷
Er ist mein Schatz, ich bin sein Braut,
Sehr hoch in ihm erfreuet.**

1. *Whoever does² have faith [in Jesus] and is baptized, he will become blessed [with eternal salvation].*

2. [The gift of] faith³ is the pledge of the love
That Jesus fosters for those who are his.
Thus he has—purely out of love’s impulses,
When he would inscribe me into the Book of Life⁴—
Committed/bequeathed⁵ to me this prize⁶ [of salvation].

**3. Lord God Father, my mighty hero,
You have loved me eternally, [ever since] before⁹ the
world [was created],
In your son [Jesus].
Your son has betrothed me to himself;
He is my treasure; I am his bride,¹⁰**

¹Mark 16:16.

²The word “da” had many meanings in older German. It was often used, as here, in between subject and verb with no further import than to intensify the verb. (Compare, e.g., “Whoever thinks they can get away with this” with “Whoever does think they can get away with this.”)

³That is, in Lutheranism it was fundamentally understood that the Christians’ faith is not their pledge of their love for Jesus. Faith was taken to be an unmerited gift from God that was a pledge of Jesus’s love for his followers.

⁴In the Bible, the “Book of Life” is a roster of names of those people who will survive the manifestation of God’s wrath. According to Revelation 21:27, only those inscribed in this roster will enter heaven, “the new Jerusalem.” The Luther Bibles of Bach’s day give various designations—“Lebensbuch,” however, not being one of them—for what is typically rendered or understood in English Bibles as “the Book of Life”: e.g., “das Buch der Lebendigen” (“the Book of the Living”) in Psalm 69:29; simply “das Buch” (“the book”) in Daniel 12:1 and “mein Buch” (“my [the Lord’s] book”) in Exodus 32:33; “das Buch des Lebens” (“the Book of Life”) in Philippians 4:3 and Revelation 3:5, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15, and 22:19; and “das lebendige Buch des Lammes” (“the living Book of the Lamb”) in Revelation 21:27.

⁵The verb “beilegen” has a very wide variety of meanings in modern German and also a wide variety of still different meanings in older German. The sense in this aria apparently stems from 2 Timothy 1:12, which in the Luther Bibles of Bach’s day reads “Ich weiss, an welchen ich glaube, und bin gewiss, dass er mir kann meine Beilage bewahren bis an jenen Tag” (“I know in whom I believe [or, ‘have faith’], and am certain that he [God] is able to safekeep to me my inheritance up until that day [of the return of Jesus, the Day of Judgment]”). As Lutheran commentary of Bach’s day explains, the word “Beilage” in 2 Timothy 1:12 means “das Erbe im Himmel, das ewige Leben” (“the [Christian’s] inheritance in heaven, [namely] eternal life”).

⁶In older and in modern German, “Kleinod” can mean “gem,” jewel,” or “treasure.” But in older German, the term can be, as it is here, a synonym for “Belohnung” (“prize”) or “Siegeszeichen” (literally, “sign of victory,” e.g., a trophy or a gold medal). The idea is that Christians, through God’s (unmerited) gift of true faith, are awarded the “Kleinod/Belohnung” of eternal salvation in the “race” of life. The Luther Bibles of Bach’s day employ the word “Kleinod” in this way in 1 Corinthians 9:24 and Philippians 3:14.

⁷“Vertrauen” is here an older German synonym for “verloben” (“to be betrothed”).

⁹The word “vor” is grammatically ambiguous: it can mean “prior to” or “under the [in this case, hostile] eyes of.” The former sense is meant here, based on the sentiments of John 17:24 and Ephesians 1:4.

¹⁰In saying “I am his bride,” this line is referring to the great wedding feast predicted to take place at the end time, when, according to Revelation 19:7-9, the “Lamb [of God],” namely God’s son and messiah, Jesus, will marry his bride, the church. Also, as a member of the church, any individual Christian—female or male—was considered to be the “bride” of Christ.

Eia! Eia!
Himmlich Leben
Wird er geben
Mir dort oben;
Ewig soll mein Herz ihn loben.⁸

Exceedingly gladdened in him.
Ah yes, ah yes!¹¹
Heavenly life
He will give me
There above [in heaven];
My heart shall eternally praise him.

4. Ihr Sterblichen, verlanget ihr mit mir
Das Antlitz Gottes anzuschauen?
So dürft ihr nicht auf gute Werke bauen;
Denn ob sich wohl ein Christ
Muss in den guten Werken üben,
Weil es der ernste Wille Gottes ist,
So macht der Glaube doch allein,
Dass wir vor Gott gerecht und selig sein.

4. You mortals, do you long, with me,
To behold God's countenance?
Then you must not rely on good works;
For although, to be sure, a Christian
Is required to exercise himself in good works
(Because it is the stern¹² will of God),
Faith alone, nonetheless, then makes possible
That we are¹³ justified¹⁴ in God's eyes and blessed [with
salvation].

5. Der Glaube schafft der Seele Flügel,
Dass sie sich in den Himmel schwingt,
Die Taufe ist das Gnadensiegel,
Das uns den Segen Gottes bringt;
Und daher heisst ein selger Christ,
Wer gläubet und getauft ist.

5. Faith provides the [butterfly-like] wings of the soul¹⁵
So that it soars into heaven;
Baptism is the [royal] seal of approval¹⁶
That brings God's blessing to us;
And hence whoever has faith and has been baptized
Is called a blessed [saved] Christian.

6. Den Glauben mir verleihe
An dein Sohn Jesum Christ,
Mein Sünd mir auch verzeihe
Allhier zu dieser Frist.
Du wirst mir nicht versagen,

6. Grant me faith
In your son Jesus Christ;
Also, forgive me my sin

⁸A stanza of "Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern."

¹¹"Eia" is a contraction of "ei ja" ("ah yes").

¹²An allusion to Romans 11:22, "Darum schau die Güte und den Ernst Gottes" ("Behold therefore the benevolence and the sternness of God").

¹³"Sein" here is an older German conjugation that corresponds to the indicative "sind"; it is not a poetically clipped version of the subjunctive form, "seien."

¹⁴These lines derive their language from Luther's famous and much-disputed rendering of Romans 3:28. The original Greek texts read "Logizometha gar dikaiousthai pistei anthropon choris ergon nomou" ("We therefore reckon a/the person to be righteous/justified [in God's eyes] by [Christian] faith, without [necessarily having successfully carried out the] works of the law [of Moses]"). Luther's (final) translation—the one in use in Bach's day—reads "So halten wir es nun, dass der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werk, allein durch den Glauben" ("Now therefore we hold it [to be true] that the person may [turn out to] be justified [in God's eyes for eternal salvation] without the work/achievement/agency of the law [of Moses], by [Christian] faith alone"). Modern Luther Bibles and other German Bibles have updated Luther's renderings of this key passage, either lightly or heavily.

¹⁵This line alludes to the mythological conception of the butterfly as an emblem of the soul. In artistic depictions, e.g., a butterfly will fly out of the mouth of a dead person; in ancient Greek the word for "soul" and for "butterfly" was "psyche."

¹⁶A "Gnadensiegel" is the literal "seal of approval" of a monarch on a document, with a pun here on "Gnade" ("grace") in the theological sense.

**Was du verheissen hast,
Dass er mein Sünd tu tragen
Und lös mich von der Last.¹⁷**

**Here, in this [allotted] time span [of one's life on earth].¹⁸
You will not deny me
What you have promised:
That he [Jesus] would undertake to bear my sin
And would free me from its burden.**

(transl. Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed)



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¹⁷A stanza of “Ich dank dir, lieber Herr.”

¹⁸This line’s “diese Frist” most likely refers to “this human lifespan,” “one’s time on earth.” This is the way the word “Frist” is employed in Luther’s rendering of Genesis 6:3, where God declares of human beings (who earlier in the biblical narratives had been granted lifespans that were much longer), “Ich will ihnen noch Frist geben hundertundzwanzig Jahre” (“I will [henceforth] grant them yet [as a] time span [the life expectancy] of one hundred and twenty years [in which to repent of their wickedness]”).