

THE PASSION FOR PEOPLE

Abstract:

In 2024, Lutherans observe the 300th anniversary of Bach's St. John's Passion, both a musical masterpiece and a remarkable example of creative worship. Throughout the three centuries that followed its publication, preachers and worship planners sought creative ways to bring Jesus' death to life in their celebrations of Lent and Holy Week.

Key Points:

- J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion* composed by a well-read, highly-principled liturgical church musician.
- *Scriptural narratives* provide the predominant structural foundation.
- Well-known *Lutheran chorales* offered contemporary connections for those gathered.
- A carefully curated libretto of *supportive poetry* offered opportunities for personal reflection.
- Powerful drama is highlighted throughout the musical plan, but its sentiment was consistently *extra nos*.
- The impact of the *St. John's Passion* was not profound during Bach's lifetime, but remains important today.

Applications:

- How do we go about setting the scriptural foundation for worship in Lent and Holy Week?
- How have the thematic uses of familiar hymns old and new invited participation among gathered people?
- How do we identify poetic forms that reflect and enhance the story itself? Solo reflection? Choral reflection?
- How do we ensure that the passion drama is emphasized "Extra Nos?" Examples of overdone drama?

Recommended Reading:

- Gardiner, John Eliot., *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2013., 343-396.
- Loewe, Andreas and Katherine Firth: *Martin Luther and the Arts*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2023).
- Loewe, Andreas, *Johann Sebastian Bach's St. John Passion (BWV 245): A Theological Commentary, With a new Study Translation by Katherine Firth*. Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden: Brill, 2014).
- Leaver, Robin A., "Religion and Religious Currents," in *The Worlds of Johann Sebastian Bach*, ed. Raymond Erickson (Milwaukee: Amadeus Press, an imprint of Hal Leonard, 2009), 105-140.
- Smither, Howard E. *The Oratorio in the Baroque Era - Protestant Germany and England: A History of the Oratorio, 4 vols.* Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina: 1977. 3-171.
- Sposato, Jeffery S. *Leipzig after Bach: Church and Concert Life in a German City*. London: Oxford University Press: 2018.
- Stiller, Guenther. *Johann Sebastian Bach and Liturgical Life in Leipzig*. Translated by Herbert J.A. Bouman, Daniel F. Poelet, and Hilton C. Oswalt. Edited by Robin A. Leaver. St Louis: Concordia, 1984. 1-254.
- Tiefel, James, "The Passion History in Lenten Worship" *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 120, no. 4 (Fall 2023): 305ff.
- Westermeier, Paul. *Te Deum: The Church and Music*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998., 222-244.
- Wolff, Christoph. *Bach: The Learned Musician*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001., 288-303.
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The Structure of J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion* (April 7, 1724)

	Biblical Verses (Narratives)	Chorale Stanzas (Sources)	Contemplative Poetry (Authors)
Prelude:	1. Herr, unser Herrscher <i>(after Psalm 8:1)</i>		
Act 1: Hortus	2. John 18:1-8 <i>The Garden of Gethsemane</i>	3. O grosse Lieb, o Lieb ohh alle Maße <i>HERZLIEBER JESU (7)</i>	
	4. John 18:9-11 <i>Peter strikes Malchus</i>	5. Dein Will gescheh, Herr Gott, zugleich <i>VATER UNSER IM HIMMELREICH (4)</i>	
Act 2: Pontifex	6. John 18: 12-14 <i>Jesus led to Annas</i>		7. Von den Stricken (Berthold Brockes)
	8. John 18:15a <i>John and Peter follow</i>		9. Ich Folge dir gleichfalls (unknown)
	10. John 18:15b-23 <i>Peter accused, Jesus abused</i>	11. Wer hat dich so geschlagen? <i>O WELT SIEH HIER DEIN LEBEN (3,4)</i>	
	12. John 18:24-27, Mt. 26:75 <i>Peter's Denial</i>		13. Ach, mein Sinn (Christian Weise)
		14. Petrus der nicht denkt züruck <i>JESU LEIDEN, PEIN, UND TOD (10)</i>	
Sermon			
Act 3: Pilatus		15. Christus, der uns selig macht <i>CHRISTUS, DER UNS SELIG (1)</i>	
	16. John 18:28-36 <i>"So you are a king, then"</i>	17. Ach, großer König <i>HERZLIEBER JESU (8-9)</i>	
	18. John 18:37-19:1 <i>"What is truth?"</i>		19. Betrachte, meine Seel 20. Erwäge (Brockes, alt.)
	21. John 19:2-12a <i>Pilate presents Jesus to the mob</i>	22. Durch dein Gefängnis Gottes Sohn Text: Postel, Tune: Schein <i>MACHS MIT</i>	
	23. John 19:12b-17 <i>Jesus condemned to Golgotha</i>		24. Eilt, ihr angefochtenen (Brockes)
	25. John 19:18-22 <i>"Jesus of Nazareth, King of the</i>	26. In meines Herzens Grunde <i>VALET WILL ICH DIR GEBEN (3)</i>	
Act 4: Crux	27. John 19:23-27a <i>Jesus places Mary under John's</i>	28. Er nahm alles wohl in acht <i>JESU LEIDEN, PEIN, UND TOD (20)</i>	
	29. John 19:27b-30a <i>All is accomplished</i>		30. Es ist vollbracht (Christian Postel]
	31. John 19:30b <i>Jesus bows his head and dies</i>	32. (Jesu, der du warest Tod) <i>JESU LEIDEN, PEIN, UND TOD (34)</i>	32. Mein teurer Heiland (Brockes)
	33. Mt. 27:51-52 <i>The temple curtain torn apart</i>		34. Mein Herz (Brockes) 35. Zerfliesse, Mein Herz
	36. John 19:31-37 <i>Jesus' bones not broken</i>	37. O hilf, Christe, Gottes Sohn <i>CHRISTUS, DER UNS SELIG (8)</i>	
Act 5: Sepulchum	38. John 19:38-42 <i>Jesus buried by two disciples</i>		39. Ruht wohl (unknown)
		40. Ach Herr, lass dein lieb' Engelein <i>HERZLICH LIEB HAB ICH (3)</i>	