

Johann Sebastian

**BACH**

**CHRISTMAS ORATORIO**

(BWV 248)

for Soli, Chorus and Orchestra  
with English text

CHORAL SCORE

K 06001



# BACH'S CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

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## PREFACE.

J. S. Bach was born in 1685 and died in 1750. The Christmas Oratorio bears the date of 1734 in the Original Score; so that it is an emanation of his ripest powers, and perhaps shews his versatility more than any other work; the subject lending itself to different shades of expression more than the Passion, by the two settings of which he is more generally known, and in which he is bound by the nature of the subject to sombre hues. In the Christmas Oratorio we have strains of exuberant joy, contrasted with lowly adoration of the Mystery of Humility in the God-made-man; of pastoral simplicity in the scene of the "Shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night"; of loving tenderness in the Cradle Song, and other passages; of thankfulness in the New Year's day portion; of indignation and defiance in the Soprano recitative and Air addressed to Herod. Only once is the sombre hue of the Passion used, and that in a very remarkable situation. Zion is called upon to prepare herself to receive the Bridegroom, and in reply asks "O how shall I receive Thee", the reply being set as a Choral. Instead of using the Choral (Hymn Tune) usually associated with the words, Bach substitutes for it the Tune known as "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" ("O Head, full of blood and wounds") which is so frequently used in the St. Matthew Passion, thus making it a prophecy of the Crucifixion. To enhance the solemnity he harmonizes it in the Phrygian mode. The same Choral concludes the work, but here as a Song of Victory, with martial clangour of Trumpets and Drums, and in modern tonality.

Although called an Oratorio, and evidently designed to form one whole, the work really consists of six Church Cantatas, designed for six different days of the Christmas Festival, and thus entitled.

Part 1 for Christmas Day.

- 2 for the second Christmas Festival.
- 3 for the third Christmas Festival.
- 4 for New Year's day and Circumcision.
- 5 for the Sunday after Circumcision.
- 6 for the Festival of the Epiphany.

Thus the work can be performed in six separate parts, or, as the subject indicates, in two halves, the three Christmas Cantatas, and the three post Christmas Cantatas. After what has been said of the variety in this work, it may be wondered why it is less known in England than the Passion. The answer may, perhaps, be found in the orchestration. The trumpet parts are very high and cannot be played on the ordinary trumpet. The Oboe d'amore and Oboe da caccia, at this time both obsolete instruments, are much used. The Oboe da caccia parts can be played on the cor anglais which is virtually the same instrument. Now that the Bach straight trumpet has been revived, it is to be hoped that players on it will multiply, so that the Christmas Oratorio and other superb Church works of this great musician may become familiar to the public.

# THE CHRISTMAS ORATORIO

The words based on the narratives of St. Luke II, 1—21 and St. Matthew II, 1—12

The music composed by

JOH. SEB. BACH.

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# THE CHRISTMAS ORATORIO.

VOCAL SCORE BY S. JADASSOHN.

## PART I.

### THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

"Stand up, be joyful."

#### Nº1. Coro.

Piano.

The piano accompaniment is written for a grand piano, featuring a treble and bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/8. The piece begins with a forte (f) dynamic. The right hand features intricate, flowing sixteenth-note passages, often with trills (tr) and grace notes. The left hand provides a steady, rhythmic foundation with eighth and sixteenth notes. The music is divided into six systems, each consisting of a grand staff. The overall texture is dense and melodic, typical of 19th-century choral and piano music.