

# Christ Lay in Death's Bondage

## J.S. Bach's Cantata BWV 4

(Translations by P. Farseth, March 16, 2002)

Underscore (e.g. si\_ng) indicates prolongation of a syllable.

<b>German:</b>	<b><i>Roughly Literal English</i></b>	<b>English for Performance</b>
<p><b>1) Christ lag in Todesbanden</b></p> <p>Für unsre Sünd gegeben, Er ist wieder erstanden</p> <p>Und hat uns bracht das Leben; Des wir sollen fröhlich sein,</p> <p>Gott loben und ihm dankbar sein Und singen Halleluja! Halleluja!</p>	<p><b>1) Christ lay [wrapped] in Death's bands [winding cloths, fetters]</b></p> <p>for our sin/sins given. He is again arisen [literally, fully standing up] and has brought us Life:</p> <p>For this we should joyful/ cheerful be. Praise God and to him thank- ful be and sing Hallelujah! Hallelujah!</p>	<p><b>1) Christ lay in Death's strong binding</b></p> <p>for our own sins an off'ring. He now again is standing and brings us back to living: so we all should joyful be, praise God, and to Him thank- ful be and si_ng Hallelujah! Hallelujah!</p>
<p><b>2) Den Tod niemand zwingen kunnt</b></p> <p>Bei allen Menschenkindern, Das macht alles unsre Sünd Kein Unschuld war zu finden.</p> <p>Davon kam der Tod so bald Und nahm über uns Gewalt, Hielt uns in seinem Reich gefangen. Halleluja!</p>	<p><b>2) Death no one overcome could.</b></p> <p>among all men's children (humankind). That means (adds up to) [for] all of our sin no innocence was to be found; From this came Death so soon and took over us Power, held us in his realm imprisoned. Hallelujah!</p>	<p><b>2) Death's pow'r no one master could</b></p> <p>of all Earth's tribes and peoples. That meant all of o_ur sin no innocence was finding; From this came grim Death so soon and took over us control, held us in his own realm locked up. Hallelujah!</p>
<p><b>3) Jesus Christus, Gottes Sohn,</b></p> <p>An unser Statt ist kommen</p>	<p><b>3) Jesus Christ, God's Son,</b></p> <p>to our place/stead is come</p>	<p><b>3) Jesus Christ, Great God's own Son</b></p> <p>in o_ur stead has stepped in</p>

<p>Und hat die Sünde weggetan, Damit dem Tod genommen All sein Recht und sein Gewalt, Da bleibet nichts denn Todsgestalt, Den Stachel hat er verloren.. Halleluja!</p>	<p>and has the sins put away; with that from Death taken all his right[s] and all his power. There remains nothing but Death's form/image. The sting has he/it lost. Hallelujah!</p>	<p>and has our si_ns put away and so from Death has taken all his rights and his huge might: Just his dead shell is left in sight. His sting is gone forever! Hallelujah!</p>
<p><b>4)</b> Es war ein wunderlicher Krieg Da Tod und Leben rungen, Das Leben behielt den Sieg,  Es hat den Tod verschlungen. Die Schrift hat verkündigt das, Wie ein Tod den andern frass.  Ein Spott aus dem Tod ist worden. Halleluja!</p>	<p><b>4)</b> It was a strange war:  There death and life wrestled. Life won/retained the victory.  It has Death devoured. The Scriptures have declared/ described/announced this how one death gulped the other down. An object of derision Death is turned into. Halleluja!</p>	<p><b>4)</b> It was a weird and wondrous war: There Death and Life contended. Life won and took the last score. Life has Old Death devoured! Scriptures to us all relate  how one death the other ate.  A laughingstock Death is turned to! Halleluja!</p>
<p><b>5)</b> Hier ist das rechte Osterlamm, Davon Gott hat geboten,  Das ist hoch an des Kreuzes Stamm, In heisser Lieb gebraten, Das Blut zeichnet unsere Tür, Das hält der Glaub dem Tode für, Der Würger kann uns nicht mehr schaden. Halleluja!</p>	<p><b>5)</b> Here is the proper/true Paschal lamb of which God has commanded. It's high on the cross's stem/ shaft; in hot love it's roasted. The blood marks out our door. That holds the Faith out before/in front of Death. The Destroyer can harm us no more. Hallelujah!</p>	<p><b>6)</b> Here is the proper Paschal lamb of which God has commanded. It's there high on the cross's stem; in burning love it's roasted. Its blood marks off o_ur door, Declares our Faith Old Death before. Destroyer can us no more injure! Hallelujah!</p>

<p>6) So feiern wir das hohe Fest Mit Herzensfreud und Wonne, Das uns der Herre scheinen lässt, Er ist selber die Sonne, Der durch seiner Gnade Glanz Erleuchtet unsre Herzen ganz, Der Sünden Nacht ist verschwunden. Halleluja!</p>	<p>6) So celebrate we the high feast with joy of heart and gladness that for us the Lord makes to shine: He is himself the sun which through his Grace's radiance enlightens our hearts fully/ completely. The night of sin is vanished. Hallelujah!</p>	<p>6) So celebrate we the high feast with joy of heart and gladness that for us the Lord makes to shine: He is himself our sunshine which through his bright Grace's glow lights up our hearts to see and know. Our si_ns' night is all vanished. Hallelujah!</p>
<p>7) Wir essen und leben wohl In rechten Osterfladen, Der alte Sauerteig nicht soll Sein bei dem Wort Gnaden, Christus will uns die Koste Sein Und speisen die Seel allein, Der Glaub will keins andern leben. Halleluja!</p>	<p>7) We eat and live well on the real Paschal flat bread. The old sour leaven shall not be with the Word of Grace. Christ will for us the banquet be and [He] alone the soul will feed. Faith wants no other living. Hallelujah!</p>	<p>7) We're eating and living well on the real Paschal flat bread. The old and sour yeast NOT shall [*] Be where God's Grace has acted. Christ will for us the banquet be, and He alone our souls will feed. Our Faith wants no other living. Hallelujah!</p>

The aim of the performance translation is not only to get the number of syllables in each line to match those in Martin Luther's German hymn text (which is itself somewhat uneven with elisions and stretches when it is matched to the music)...but also to fit the metrical stresses fairly and to put the images on the same syllables, wherever this is possible, so that Bach's musical painting fits the same ideas at the same point in the music. This occasionally makes for awkward syntax and word orders, but I have tried to minimize the awkwardness. I have also tried to follow the earthiness of the German original, avoiding the temptation to make the translation more elegant or "uppity" than Luther's rough-hewn original poem. Both Luther and St. Paul, his model, could be eloquent, but they got to the point by whatever road seemed to work, and they were not concerned to sound like court poets being clever for the educated and privileged classes.

[\*] The "old and sour yeast" refers to the corrupted, agitated, self-reliant, self-serving human instincts on which the faithful are no longer to depend for protection and sustenance.

– Paul Farseth, Stillwater, Minnesota, March 16, 2001