

Music Blurbs for 1-12-20: Baptism of Jesus

News and Notes:

This Sunday we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus with singing “O love, how deep, how broad, how high” and “Spirit Song.” The choir will sing “Down to the River to Pray.” Organ music is by Bach and his cousin Walther.

Sunday Bulletins

Today’s prelude is a Bach setting of the Lutheran hymn “Christ, our Lord, to the Jordan came.” The text of the hymn was written by Martin Luther in 1541. It reflects his views on baptism and was used in the church year for St. John the Baptist’s Day. He set his text to a tune that first appeared in 1524. Bach’s setting is from his collection *Klavierübung III* and is in the portion of hymns related to the Lutheran catechism. The setting is perhaps significantly written as a trio. All three figures of the Trinity do happen to appear in story of Jesus’ Baptism.

The melody of the hymn is played by the feet with an organ stop, making it sound in the tenor range. The bass line (in the left hand) consists of constantly running sixteenth notes which evoke the flowing waters of the Jordan. Also, within the composition, there are no clear cadences (stopping/starting points). Rather, it runs on amorously like flowing water. The right hand plays a series of figures such as, a musical representation of a cross. This brings us to the last verse of the hymn which explains that the saving waters of our salvation are mixed with the blood of Christ’s atonement.

Bach’s religious music is not “just music.” It lives up to Luther’s ideal that music in worship is exegesis: an explanation and interpretation of Scripture.