

FAITH

matters

December 27, 2022

Christmas with a Milkmaid



We received a video Christmas card today with a marvelously imaginative message. It came to us from the Dutch Bach Society, which is halfway through a heroic, decades-long project of posting new, live, period-instrument recordings of all of

Bach's 1200 works, one or two per week, for free for all the world to enjoy. The 375 videos of Bach's works that they have so far posted on YouTube have been viewed more than 92 million times.

In this musical-visual Christmas card, we see Vermeer's milkmaid, sitting still....and then she comes to life. We (and perhaps the milkmaid) hear an ancient Christmas hymn (Latin words and melody from the 5th century, adapted by Martin Luther into German in the 15th century).

As the All of Bach commentary explains:

"Bewitched by Bach, Vermeer's Milkmaid steps out of her frame after an age-long lockdown. Slowly, she awakens on her stool and as she pours the milk she is accompanied by a chorale from Bach's cantata 121. It seems almost as though she's singing to herself. The chorale text refers loosely to the painting: [the gushing of God's grace, the maid, the babe feeding on milk]. The painting thus acquires a sort of biblical perspective."

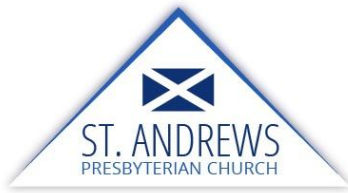
To see this divine perspective on Vermeer's humble milkmaid, watch and listen here:

[Click here to listen](#)

Here are the verses of Luther's hymn used in the video, and my singable English translation (also included on the All of Bach site):

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| 1. Christum wir sollen loben schon,
Der reinen Magd Marien Sohn,
Soweit die liebe Sonne leucht't
Und an aller Welt Ende reicht. | 1. O Christ, to you all praise be done,
O you the Virgin Mary's son,
As wide as sunlight is unfurled
And to all the ends of the world. |
| 3. Die göttlich' Gnad' vom Himmel groß
Sich in die keusche Mutter goß;
Ein Mägdlein trug ein heimlich Pfand,
Das der Natur war unbekannt. | 3. A godly gush of heavenly grace
Into the mother chaste was placed;
Divine the pledge, the maiden's own,
That in all Nature was unknown. |
| 5. Die edle Mutter hat gebor'n
Den Gabriel verhiess zuvorn,
Den Sankt Johann's mit Springen zeigt',
Da er noch lag im Mutterleib. | 5. A noble mother birthed as well
As was promised by Gabriel,
Saint John leaped up for joy that day,
When in his mother's womb he lay. |
| 6. Er lag im Heu mit Armut groß,
Die Krippe hart ihn nicht verdroß;
Es ward ein' kleine Milch sein' Speis',
Der nie kein Vöglein hungern liess. | 6. In utter poverty he lay,
Accepting manger lined with hay,
On just a little milk he feeds,
Who saw to every creature's needs. |
| 8. Lob, Ehr und Dank sei dir gesagt,
Christ, geborn von der reinen Magd,
Mit Vater und dem Heiligen Geist
Von nun an bis in Ewigkeit! | 8. All praise and honor to you, Lord,
For your coming into this world.
With Father, Spirit---Trinity
From now and to Eternity. |

~Written by Ruth Griffioen



8190 Lincoln Rd. Beulah, MI 49617

231.882.4241

www.benziestandrews.com



Benzie St. Andrews | 8190 Lincoln Rd, Beulah, MI 49617

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