

12th Day of Christmas

January 5th, 2021

<i>Gelobet Seist Du, Jesu Christ</i> (LSB 382)	J.S. Bach
<i>Der Tag, der ist so Freudenreich</i> (O hail this brightest day of days)	J. S. Bach
<i>Vom Himmel hoch</i> (LSB 358)	Johann Pachelbel
<i>Vom Himmel hoch</i> (incorporating “Silent Night”)	Max Reger
The Magi (We 3 Kings)	John Leavitt (piano)
The Magi (Orientale)	Stanley Saxton
Brightest and best	John Leavitt
March of the Magi Kings	Theodore Dubois

We wrap up our 12 Days of Christmas Music with two Christmas chorale settings by Bach, one by Pachelbel and one by Max Reger, and 4 selections that look ahead to tomorrow, the Feast of the Epiphany. The final selection has a sustained high note which sounds throughout much of the piece, as a representation of the Star of Bethlehem that guided the Magi on their journey in search of the Infant Savior.

Jonathan Moyer, Professor of Organ at Oberlin College Conservatory (my *alma mater*), has written a delightful arrangement for organ solo of The 12 Days of Christmas, titled “The 12 Keys of Christmas.” It takes the listener through all 12 major keys, one for each note in an octave scale. Here is link to his performance of this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_f0H0rIHMs&feature=youtu.be

Thank you for listening to these musical excursions through the vast repertoire of Christmas music! As a final note, here is the history and full text of a carol that we last heard at St. John Lutheran on Christmas Eve of 2018, played by our Alleluia Ringers.

On Christmas Day in 1863 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow continued to grieve the death of his beloved second wife Fannie who had died two years prior when her housedress caught fire. Longfellow himself tried to extinguish those flames with his own body but Fannie did not survive the accident. During the subsequent two years Henry’s oldest son would enlist in the Union army to fight in the Civil War. On December 1 of that year, Henry would receive a telegram that his son had been shot during a battle of the Mine Run campaign. The location of the exit wound from the bullet would put his son at risk of being paralyzed.

This father of six, now widowed, worried for the future of his children, all while cannons thundered in the south, captured his feelings as he heard the bells that Christmas day in his poem titled,

'Christmas Bells'. Longfellow and his feelings of despair were overcome with hope by what he chose to listen to. He chose amidst the grief, amidst the cannons, amidst the fighting and hate to listen to the bells of hope.

I include below the words to the entire poem with verses that are not included in the song. They paint the beautiful picture of a man who found his hope as he bowed his head and listened more intently to his maker.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along the unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound the carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn the households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong, And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail, The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."