

The text of Georg Friedrich Handel's „Messiah“

Study material for small groups

Introduction

Using the following notes we would like to get to know of the most important sacred works better: Handel's "Messiah". Nowadays, many sacred works are seen "purely musically" and performed in a corresponding manner. The close connection between text and music often does not receive enough attention.

The "Messiah" is concerned with the message of biblical texts. If we understand these, Handel's music will also be better accessible to us. Because they lead us into the centre of the biblical message, they also help us to understand better the Christian faith - the most important basis of western cultural history.

Most of the texts of the "Messiah" come to us in the form of the "prophetic word". They are addressed first of all to the people of Israel. But they also speak to us. We are also included amongst the intended hearers - we, with our needs and fears, with our hope of salvation and finally with our joy and our faith.

If we allow the texts of the "Messiah" come close to us in this way and discuss them in groups, we may find some points a little strange, because "another world" is opened to us. But opening oneself to the unknown is the particular privilege and gift of every artist. So - we wish you much joy with the "Messiah"!

How to use this material?

- You can use it in weekly small groups for Christians and others.
- It would be good to have 1-2 sessions for each chapter.
- Please, take time to listen to a good recording of the "Messiah" before going through the text.
- Please, give us a feed-back about your experiences – to: info@crescendo.org
- You are allowed to print out the text and hand it out to the participants, but not to publish it for commercial reasons.

Some facts about Handel's "Messiah"

Handel wrote the oratorio in 1741 in 24 days during a stay in Ireland. The text was compiled by the librettist Charles Jennens. The first performance took place in 1742 in Dublin and was a success.

It was denied success in London. Many believers were appalled because the "Messiah" was not music for a church service but a "Grand Musical Entertainment" (Jennens). They considered that these Bible passages should only be heard in a liturgical setting. The Bishop of London forbade any performance in an Anglican church.

The "Messiah" first became more popular after 1750 and was subsequently performed seventy times during Handel's lifetime. As Mozart arranged and performed the work in 1789, it was still little known in Germany.

At the core of the "Messiah" are Bible passages about Jesus Christ: prophetic utterances from the Old Testament and some Bible passages from the New Testament. The well-known stories about Jesus, as we know them from the Gospels, are not included. There is therefore no dramatic action as in other oratorios or operas of Handel's.

The audience generally knew the Bible very well. So they knew what the oratorio was about.

The "Messiah" has three parts which are subdivided into individual scenes. The musical structure predominantly takes the form of Recitative / Accompagnato – Aria – Chorus

The overall structure of the "Messiah":

I: Promise of the "Messiah" / of the birth of Christ

- i Prophecy of redemption (2-4)
- ii Prophecy of the coming judgement and purification (5-7)
- iii Prophecy of the birth of "Immanuel" (7a-11)
- iv The birth of Christ, the angels appear to the shepherds (12-15)
- v How Jesus Christ acted: miracles, the good shepherd (16-18)

II: Passion

- i The sacrifice to redeem the sheep gone astray (19-23)
- ii Whipping, death, passage through Hell, resurrection (24-29)
- iii The victorious Messiah raised on high (30-32).
- iv Proclamation of the word (33-34).
- v Opposition to the word (35-36).
- vi God's triumph (37-39)

III: Redemption of the world and the overcoming of death

- i The promise of the resurrection through the Redeemer (40-43)
- ii Victory over death and sin, grace in judgement (43b-46)
- iii Glorification of the Sacrificial Lamb (47-48)

1.

In the Old Testament, prophecy often appears, speaking of how God is going to create a good future. The bringer of this new era is the Messiah (= Hebrew for Anointed by God). The oratorio begins with a **Sinfonia (1)** which, like the overture of an opera, introduces the theme of the "Messiah".

What atmosphere does the Sinfonia create?

"Comfort ye..."

After the Sinfonia, the curtain, so to speak, is raised. There is a change of atmosphere. Israel, God's people, has turned to other gods and has fallen into captivity. Suddenly, a voice is raised here, speaking of comfort and prophesying help.

2. Accompagnato (Tenor) : Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.

A question for us: life is often difficult and brings battles with it. We also make mistakes along the way and become guilty in dealings with others. And when we hear the daily reports of horrors in the world we can agree with the old Christian poets that the world is a "vale of tears". Have we sometimes experienced how, in the middle of difficulties, of sadness or also where we have made a bad mistake, a "voice" or help has reached us, comforting or "freeing" us?

„Prepare ye the way of the Lord...,

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness; prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40 : 1-3) **3. Air (Tenor)**: Ev'ry valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry mountain and hill made low; the crooked straight and the rough places plain. **4. Chor**: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. (Isaiah 40 : 5)

We are in the middle of the prophecy of the Old Testament: **the glory of the Lord shall be revealed**. "Revealed" means in Hebrew thought: it takes place before our eyes, we become witnesses of a special event.

The images and terms that are used here speak of **the high being brought down and the low raised up** when God comes. We know this also from the "Magnificat", in which Mary quotes from Old Testament texts. "He throws down the mighty from their thrones and raises the humble." (Luke 1, 51). That means: when God intervenes in the events of the world, He reverses existing relationships and creates order where disorder rules! The hungry are filled, the prisoners free, those that sit in darkness see the light,...(see also Isaiah 49, 8 ff.).

And what about us? We should not remain passive spectators, for a voice (an angel's voice?) calls: "**Prepare the way of the Lord...**" What does this mean? – We can understand this, as John the Baptist did when he used the same words, as a call to repentance. If God is coming to put an end to wrong-doing, then we ourselves should begin to do this by regretting our bad deeds and stopping doing them. "Prepare the way of the Lord... See that you produce fruit in keeping with repentance... whoever has two coats should give to him who has none.. Do not demand more money than is allowed... Do no violence or wrong to anyone..." are the words of John the Baptist (Lukas 3).

The Old Testament says to us: God is just. He hates injustice and violence and will punish them. When the Messiah comes, the Day of Judgement comes as well and will shake

everything. God will then appear in the temple (= in the middle of his people) (5). No-one can withstand this. (6). God come with purifying fire and (6) and He will also purify the "sons of Levi", i.e. purify the priests. (7).

God's justice and His comfort belong together. It comforting for whoever does wrong in as far as he hears the call to repentance and follows it before it is too late. And it comforting for whoever suffers wrong. Where have we suffered wrong and then received comfort from knowing "God knows about it! He will help me. I don't have to fight grimly myself". Where do we fight too much for our own right – where it would be better to trust God more?

Build up, build up, prepare the road!... For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives for ever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." (Isaiah 57,14-16)

5. Accompagnato (Bass): Thus saith the Lord, the Lord of Hosts: Yet once a little while and I will shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations; and the desire of all nations shall come. (Haggai 2 : 6-7) The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. (Malachi 3 : 1) **6. Air (Alto):** But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner's fire. (Malachi 3 : 2) **7. Chorus:** And He shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. (Malachi 3 : 3)

2.

7a: Recitative (Alto): Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel, God with us. (Isaiah 7 : 14; Matthew 1 : 23) **8: Air (Alto) & 8a: Chorus:** O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain. O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God! Arise, shine, for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. (Isaiah 40 : 9; Isaiah 60 : 1) **9: Accompagnato (Bass):** For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. (Isaiah 60 : 2-3) **10: Air (Bass):** The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; and they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. (Isaiah 9 : 2) **11: Chorus:** For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9 : 6)

Immanuel

The Old Testament predicts that the Messiah will bring judgement. Jesus does not put this prophecy out of, for he speaks of his return before the Last Judgement. But the central message of the New Testament is: in Jesus the Messiah **has already** come. An angel appears to Joseph in a dream and announces Jesus as the Immanuel of Isaiah 7.14.

Immanuel means: God with us. The Messiah Jesus will thus show us that God is with us. The names in (11) go in the same direction: Wonderful, Counsellor, Prince of Peace, etc.

As humans, we often think that God is against us...or in his absolute sovereignty high above us...or he is in some way indifferent towards us...or... Such ideas leave an impression on our faith and, in the final analysis, on our lives. Can we say that we agree with this statement?

That God is with us and comes to us is good news (8). When God comes to us, His glory will lighten the darkness and nations will be drawn to this. (9 and 10).

What difference does it make if we believe that God is "with us" and for us"? Have we experienced this in some way?

Digression:

Prophecies in the Old Testament and their significance for Jesus

On the individual prophets: a prophet, hebrew nabi, »called, sent«, is a person that God has called and sent to be His mouthpiece. **MOSES** and his sister **MIRIAM** are already counted as prophets. In the 11th century, **Samuel** appeared, who also appointed the kings. At David's court, the prophet **NATHAN** called the king to repentance. Major prophets in the 9th century were **ELIJAH** (- see Mendelssohn's "Elijah"; he stood up against the cult of Baal) and **ELISHA** (he performed miracles which pointed ahead to Jesus and led a school of prophets).

With **ISAIAH**, (8th century), the first prophet whose utterances have reached us appears. The name Isaiah already contains a part of his message: "Yahweh, the God of Israel and creator of the whole world, is the only bringer of salvation and redemption." His message includes the threat of judgement on a people laden with guilt, the offer of repentance and forgiveness, the proclamation of redemption through a messianic bringer of freedom, in particular through the "ebed Yahweh" (= servant, son of God) in chapters 42-57. In the middle of chapter 53, the servant of God gives himself as a sacrifice for sin and thus creates peace with God. This prophecy relates to Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins. It was with good reason that Isaiah was named the »fifth evangelist«. In the later chapters, we hear that God will renew heaven and earth (as later in the Book of Revelation).

JEREMIAH and **EZEKIEL** are further "major prophets" who appear in the context of the exile of the people of Israel. Jeremiah also wrote laments (s. Messiah No. 27; Stravinsky: „Threni.,). The Book of **DANIEL** speaks of the end times and of the "Son of Man" send by God (Jesus applies this name to himself). In the "Messiah", there are also texts from the "twelve minor prophets": from **HAGGAI**, **ZECHARIAH** and **MALACHI**, who saw the coming "Messiah". In the **PSALMS**, there are also prophetic passages.

Contents of the prophecy: there is the threat of judgement to move the people to turn away from other gods, from injustice (in Israel there were very just social rules which protected the weak!) and from wrong politics. Salvation comes because God accepts repentance and is gracious. The Redeemer sent by God (often called the "Messiah") brings salvation. When? The prophets give no dates. But they see that through the coming of the "Messiah" an entirely new era (the end times) starts.

Jesus and the "Messiah" prophecies: Jesus sees himself as the foretold Saviour – to the irritation of the contemporary teachers of the Law! Those around him also began to see in him the Son of God. Jesus for example reads Isaiah 61 in the synagogue and says "Today this word is fulfilled". (Luke 4,18 ff.). Or he does things that, according to Isaiah, the Servant of God is going to do: heal, raise the dead, (Matthew 11,5), free prisoners (the possessed)...And he dares to do what only God "is allowed" to do (e.g. forgive sins (Mark 2)).

He is, according to the representation in the Gospels, the "Lamb of God" of Isaiah 53, suffering in our place. ("The Lord laid upon him the sins of us all" (Jesaja 53,6)). We cannot understand Jesus if we do not learn to see him as as he saw himself, that is, as the fulfilling of ancient prophecies!

Discussion: if Jesus of Nazareth sees himself in this way, what does this mean for our picture of Jesus?

3.

The birth of Jesus

This part begins with the story of Jesus' birth. It is introduced by shepherds' music, an idea we also know from the Christmas Oratorio. The numbers 12-16 are the reason why the "Messiah" is also popular as a Christmas piece.

12: Pifa (Sinfonia pastorale), 12a: Recitative (Soprano): There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. (Luke 2 : 8). **13: Accompagnato (Sopran):** And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. (Luke 2 : 9) **13a: Recitativo (Soprano):** And the angel said unto them: Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2 : 10-11). **14: Accompagnato (Soprano):** And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: **15: Chorus:** Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, good will towards men. (Luke 2 : 13+14).

But it noticeable that the Christmas story is told in relatively short form. The "Messiah" does not attempt to include dramatic events.

The good shepherd

Soon the alto returns to the prophecy of the Old Testament with the brilliant "Rejoice" on the text from Isaiah 40, with which the oratorio had begun. The "Messiah" dwells on these statements for some time.

16: Air (Soprano): Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is the righteous Saviour, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen. (Zechariah 9 : 9-10) Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. **17: Recitative (Alto)** Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. (Isaiah 35 : 5-6). **Air (Alto):** He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; and He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40 : 11) Come unto Him, all ye that labour, come unto Him that are heavy laden, and He will give you rest. Take His yoke upon you, and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. (Matthew 11 : 28-29) **18: Chorus:** His yoke is easy, and his burden is light. (Matthew 11 : 30)

Here the subject is God as the good shepherd, lovingly taking care of his sheep (his people). By the way, Jesus speaks in these terms about himself in John 10: "I am the good shepherd!" (and thus puts himself on the same level as God!). So how does Jesus take care of the "sheep"?

Which biblical stories of Jesus give an answer on this? Which passages have perhaps particularly spoken to you and become important for you?

In the "Messiah", the words from Isaiah (17) give an answer. They point to the miracles that Jesus did – here to the healings. Combined with that is one of Jesus' statements about himself, rendered here in the third person: "Come to me all who are weary and burdened..." Later, in (23) we find again the picture of the sheep. The sheep are now scattered, an idea which is portrayed here very well in music.

23: Chorus: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53 : 6)

The offer of the Good Shepherd to the sheep is: come to me with all your burdens, with all your suffering, with all your wrong-doing – and with the fact that you have "gone astray", i.e. gone your own way without God.

This offer has no expiry date. It applies to each one of us - today!

What burdens and sufferings load us down? Let us bring them in prayer – alone or together with someone else - to Jesus Christ.

4.

[Part II]

19: Chorus: Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. (*John 1:29*) **20: Air (Alto):** He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. (*Isaiah 53 : 3*). He gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: He hid not His face from shame and spitting. (*Isaiah 50 : 6*). **21: Chorus:** Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows! He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. (*Isaiah 53 : 4-5*). **22: Chorus:** And with His stripes we are healed. (*Isaiah 53 : 5*). **23: Chorus:** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (*Isaiah 53 : 6*). **24: Accompagnato (Tenor):** All they that see Him laugh Him to scorn; they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying: (*Psalms 22 : 7*). **25: Chorus:** He trusted in God that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, if He delight in Him. (*Psalms 22 : 8*). **26: Accompagnato (Tenor):** Thy rebuke hath broken His heart: He is full of heaviness. He looked for some to have pity on Him, but there was no man, neither found He any to comfort Him. (*Psalms 69 : 20*). **27: Arioso (Tenor):** Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow. (*Lamentations 1 : 12*). **28: Accompagnato (Sopran):** He was cut off out the land of the living: for the transgressions of Thy people was He stricken. (*Isaiah 53 : 8*). **29: Air (Soprano):** But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. (*Psalms 16 : 10*)

The Lamb of God

In this part, the subject is the Passion of Christ. It opens with a prophecy by John the Baptist, spoken as he saw Jesus coming: "**See the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.**" He is referring to Isaiah 53: ... These words contain the whole message of the Passion.

1. The lamb led to the slaughter

- The "Messiah" dying on the cross is the opposite of the triumphal Messiah expected by the Jews at the time of Jesus. People were hoping for a divine saviour who would free them from oppression under the Romans.
- Jesus' death on the cross also frustrated all the expectations of the disciples, who had seen many miracles.
- That the man crucified should be God's Son was in the times of the early church a contradiction of the concepts of God held by the contemporary world. The Greeks and Romans knew only proud gods and only a victorious king of the gods.
- That God's Son had to die on the cross (or the other way round, that the crucified one was the "Messiah") - that was considered the greatest "skandalon" (scandal, offence)! The only response is to believe or doubt.

2. The lamb sent from God

- It was no coincidence, and it was also more than a planned crime, that Jesus had to die. God wanted it this way.
- It was also not a death that Jesus himself sought. He asked God if he could be spared it, but said "not my will but your will be done." This request is referred to cynically in the Chorus (25). (The chorus in the "Messiah" otherwise has a positive role). This passage underlines that it was incomprehensible that God should allow such a thing to happen.

3. The lamb that bears the sins of the world

- There is only one explanation for the death on the cross. This becomes clear from four links:
 - a. From the link to the prophecies of the Old Testament.
 - b. From the link to Jesus' own words, which predicted his suffering.
 - c. From the link to subsequent events – to the resurrection.
 - d. From the link to the subsequent story in the Bible or of the people who had experienced Jesus as the "redeemer from guilt".

- The explanation: Jesus died on the cross in order to bear the sins of the world, i.e. to take them away. The Bible contains many pictures referring to what happens here (substitutionary sacrifice, payment of debts, etc.).
- The person who believes that Jesus Christ died for his guilt receives forgiveness and reconciliation with God. He thus enters a new covenant which God makes with us.

***Has this message already become important for us? If yes, when and how?
What is "guilt" and "forgiveness of guilt"? How can one experience this forgiveness?
What were / are the consequences of this for our life?***

A glance "across" to the St. Matthew Passion shows that Bach often lets the chorus give the "answers of faith" (as also in the Christmas Oratorio and in the St. John Passion). For Bach was writing music for church services - in contrast to Handel. For this reason his congregation can reply:

"I am the one who must repent.../ the whipping and chains / and what you bore / these were what my soul deserved.."

5.

"I know that my Redeemer liveth..."

29. Air (Soprano): But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption. (*Psalm 16 : 10*) **40. Air (Soprano):** I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. (*Job 19 : 25-26*). For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. (*1 Corinthians 15 : 20*).

The aria " But Thou didst not leave His (my) soul in hell (in death)" closes the section II,ii. After speaking of the death of the "Messiah", we now see a pointer towards the Resurrection. The text comes from Psalm 16,10. Soon after Easter, it was understood and quoted by the first Christians as a prophetic word from the Old Testament (Acts 2, 27 and 13,35). The theme of the Resurrection is taken up again later in the Messiah – above all in the famous aria " I know that my Redeemer liveth...". These two arias form the brackets around the numbers 30-39, which will be treated in the next chapter. So we now turn to these brackets, i.e. to the theme of the Resurrection. It is the central message of the New Testament:

The Resurrection...

- **...was already foretold in the Old Testament:** "...and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will ...prolong [his] days". Isaiah 53,10. Psalm 16, 10 and other passages speak in a veiled way about it.
- **...was foretold by Jesus himself:** "The Son of Man must suffer many things ..and must be killed and after three days rise again." (Mark 8,31; also 9,31 and 10, 32ff.)
- **...was a bodily resurrection.** Thus God "corrected" the execution on the cross.
- ...was at the same time a **resurrection to a new, heavenly body:** Jesus could now be present in several places at the same time and even go through closed doors. This means: Jesus was already "raised up" by God and confirmed as God's Son.
- **...means also a further correction by God:** Instead of "King of the Jews" (inscription INRI over the cross), Jesus was now "Kyrios" (=“Lord“) of the cosmos and would soon sit at God's right hand – see the numbers 30 + 31 in the "Messiah".
- **...was an event which surprised even Jesus' disciples.** They were in such despair over the death of Jesus that they could not have simply "invented" such a thing. They did not even believe it until they finally saw the Risen Lord and even touched him (Thomas).
- **...was testified to by many people.** Paul speaks of more than five hundred who saw him after the Resurrection. (1st Cor. 15)
- **...was proclaimed by the first Christians under threats to their lives,** so it was not an "advantageous" teaching.
- **..is in purely human terms incomprehensible.** But it is not less incomprehensible than the creation of the world or the existence of the universe – or, if one takes the Bible seriously, than the great miracles that God performed amongst the people of Israel.

"I know that my redeemer lives" are words from the Book of Job which are then applied in the Messiah" to Jesus. They reflect the central confession of the Christian faith. How does someone come to such faith? What effects result from this faith?

Remarks:

- The belief in the Resurrection is no blind faith, but is based on the experience of people who are trustworthy. These people are the biblical eye-witnesses; to them

belong also the Christian witnesses of all epochs who have experienced the risen Jesus Christ.

- The Christian does not believe primarily a teaching; it is rather a matter of a personal relationship to Jesus Christus.
- The Church has repeatedly emphasised that faith in the Resurrection is only possible because the Risen Lord helps us to believe. The statement " I know that my Redeemer liveth..." can therefore first of all be rephrased as a request: "I believe that You are alive. Help me to experience this faith turning more and more into knowledge."

6.

30. Chorus: Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory. (*Psalm 24 : 7-10*). **31a. Recitative (Tenor):** Unto which of the angels said He at any time: Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? (*Acts 13: 33; Hebrews 1 : 5; Psalm 2:7*). **31b. Chorus:** Let all the angels of God worship Him. (*Hebrews 1 : 6*). **32. Air (Alto):** Thou art gone up on high; Thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men; yea, even from Thine enemies, that the Lord God might dwell among them. (*Psalm 68 : 18*). **33. Chorus:** The Lord gave the word; great was the company of the preachers. (*Psalm 68 : 11/12*). **34. Air (Soprano):** How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. (*Isaiah 52 : 7 / Romans 10 : 15*). **35. Chorus:** Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world. (*Romans 10 : 18 / Psalm 19:4*) **36. Air (Bass):** Why do the nations so furiously rage together, and why do the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His Anointed. (*Psalm 2 : 1-2*). **37a. Chorus:** Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yokes from us. (*Psalm 2 : 3*). **37b. Recitative (Tenor):** He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in derision. (*Psalm 2 : 4*). **38. Air (Tenor):** Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (*Psalm 2 : 9; Revelation 19: 15*) **39. Chorus:** Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. (*Revelation 19 : 6*). The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. (*Revelation 11 : 15*) King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. (*Revelation 19 : 16*). Hallelujah!

This part "exults" over the rule of God (or Christ) as King and over the spreading of the Gospel. In between, the resistance against the "good news" is taken up as a theme. This culminates in the "Hallelujah" chorus, at which the British King George II sprang to his feet, thinking the "Messiah" had now reached its end. (Since then, British audiences get up from their seats for the "Hallelujah" chorus.) Here, the libretto uses principally Psalm passages, some of which are also quoted in the New Testament.

For this reason, we would now like to turn our attention to the Book of Psalms.

The Psalms – timeless and "prophetic"

The Psalms are the "songbook" of the Bible. There are 150 Psalms: Psalms of thanksgiving, lamentation, repentance, comfort etc. One of the most famous and best psalmists was King David. Many of the Psalms were sung in the Temple together with the whole assembly. The music of the Psalms has unfortunately not been passed down to us. But the verses themselves are world literature and have inspired numerous poems and of course also compositions.

The Psalms are in comparison with the words of Isaiah and other prophets, who clearly "foresaw" the "Messiah" and his mission, not so strongly prophetic.

But the Psalmists knew how God worked amongst the people and in the lives of individuals. Many Psalms deal with God's deeds in previous times. *Therefore* David could sing "You will not abandon me to death" (Psalm 24, 7-10). Because the Psalmists know who God is and how he *has acted* in the past, they can also say how he *will act* in the future. The Psalms therefore have a certain prophetic quality and have a timeless relevance for the present!

The Book of Psalms is, as Martin Luther said, a "little Bible" in itself.

Which Psalm-settings (in classical music) or poems based on the Psalms (literature) do we know?

Which Psalms have perhaps become important for us personally?

"Halleluja"

Two main statements recur constantly throughout this part which ends in the brilliant "Halleluja". The first statement is:

- the Messiah is the King of Glory. (30)
- God gives Jesus the victory – in front of the whole world, he names him his Son! (31a)¹.
- The Messiah frees prisoners; he gives mankind (divine) gifts² and lives himself amongst his enemies (32).
- The Messiah prevails with might even against the enemies of the Gospel³ (37-39).

Handel is a master of the praise of God.

Who is praised? The triumphant Messiah! But he is precisely the same Messiah who gave his life for us. In the Book of Revelation (and in Handel's Messiah No. 47) the Messiah therefore appears as the Lamb of God who is worshipped.

How important for our life is the praise of God? How can one praise God?

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis, said, "Whoever kneels before God will not kneel before anyone else." The praise of God as resistance against the enemies of God".

"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace..."

The second statement of this part is

- God sends out his word. People proclaim the Gospel of Peace (33-35).
- Resistance is aroused against the Gospel (35-36), but God is victorious (37-38).

If the Gospel is a message of peace and salvation with power to change lives (and to make an impact on society), it must be passed on. Resistance will arise against it, but battling against human opponents is not our task but God's.

Why should Christians proclaim the Gospel?

How can this happen in nowadays?

What can proclamation through music and art and/or amongst artists mean for artists:?

¹ Psalm 2 is quoted here and is really a Psalm for the King: the King of Israel is installed by God and is protected like God's "Son" from enemies. Here it is important to know that there is a promise for the royal house of David that from it the "Eternal King", the "Messiah" will come (2 Samuel 7). And Jesus is in fact a descendant of David, as his family tree shows (Matthew 1). A prophecy can therefore be seen in Psalm 2, telling of the Messiah.

² The gifts mentioned in Psalm 68, 18 have been interpreted as relating to Pentecost, to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

³ The victory over enemies is described with drastic words from Psalm 2, words which appear similarly in the Book of Revelation in the passage in which Jesus Christ is praised in the "Allelujah" chorus as "King of Kings" and Lord of Lords". In the New Testament view, the rule is "love your enemies!". Jesus did this consistently. Enemies can also be demonic forces (s. Paul's words: "We not are battling against flesh and blood, but against the evil spirits under heaven" (Ephesians 5, 12).

7.

[Part III]

40. Air (Soprano): I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. (*Job 19 : 25-26*). For now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep. (*I Corinthians 15 : 20*). **41. Chorus:** Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (*I Corinthians 15 : 21-22*). **42. Accompagnato (Bass):** Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. (*I Corinthians 15 : 51-52*). **43. Air (Bass):** The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality. (*I Corinthians 15 : 52-53*). **44a. Recitative (Alto):** Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. (*I Corinthians 15 : 54*). **44b. Duet (Alto/Tenor):** O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. (*I Corinthians 15 : 55-56*). **45. Chorus:** But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (*I Corinthians 15 : 57*). **46. Air (Soprano):** If God be for us, who can be against us? (*Romans 8 : 31*) Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us. (*Romans 8 : 33-34*). **47. Chorus:** Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. (*Revelation 5 : 12-14*) **Chorus:** Amen.

The main themes in parts I and II of the "Messiah" were the promise of the Messiah, his birth, his actions on earth, his death on the cross, his resurrection and the ultimate lordship of the Messiah.

The consequences are...

- 1) **...in the life of the individual:** in Jesus Christus, God shows that he is *with us*. Jesus Christus carries our burdens. He forgives our guilt. We can believe in the risen Christ and experience his working in our lives.
- 2) **...for the fellowship of all Christians⁴:** the fellowship proclaims the Gospel; they praise God.
- 3) **...in the "cosmic dimension":** the Messiah is Lord above all Lords.

"If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Part III presents an eschatological perspective. "Eschatology" is the "study of the last things". Here we are concerned with the "last things" of humankind and of the world; with life after death and the future of the world. Handel uses here above all texts from the letters of Paul and from Revelation.

So the Messiah brings us...

- 4) **...in the "eschatological" dimension:** resurrection after death and pardon in the last judgement.

Which texts from 40-47 do you find particularly impressive after a second reading? Which one speaks to you most strongly? Why?

- **The central question** in this context is: why are people (that is, sinners) pardoned by God in the last judgement? This is one of the most central questions in faith.

⁴ These are also important for the life of the individual Christian, but it is not only the individual Christian who has this task; precisely these are important for the existence of the Christian Church. Where churches (Christian fellowships) are not active in proclamation to the world around them and where the praise of God is missing, then something of decisive importance is missing!

- **The answer** to this could be: "Because we are not so bad. Because we have also a lot of good things. God will take our good deeds into consideration."
- **The answer the Bible gives is:**
 - "We are all sinners and we lack the righteousness that (=we lack the good deeds) which are important to God (Romans 3,23).
 - But God made Jesus Christ ("he one who had no sin") sin for our sake, so that we might become in him (=in being joined to Christ) the righteousness which is valuable in God's eyes. (2nd Corinthians 5,21). The Lamb has "redeemed us before God through his blood" (Revelation 5,.12-14).
 - No-one can accuse us! God is for us! (Romans 8,31). "God has justified us. Who can condemn us?" (Romans 8,33-34).

***The consequence of this "righteousness" is eternal life.
What results does it have in our lives here and now?
What does it mean to live as "one pardoned by God"?***

Amen

The "Messiah" closes with an impressive "Amen".

Amen – that means: "in truth" or "let it be, that is how it is". It is a recognition of all that has been sung and heard. "Amen" - a word that Jesus also used often. Sometimes even, to underline important statements, doubled:

„Amen, amen, I say to you: whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life and does not come into judgement but has passed over from death to life." (John 5,24)

***Nowadays, everything is considered "relative": values, attitudes to life, religion...
How can one then say regarding any matter "amen" and live according to it?***