

The Messiah

G. F. Handel

Words Compiled from Holy Scripture
by
Charles Jennens

Sunday, May 3rd, 2026
Briarwood Presbyterian Church
Worship Concert

Featuring the Briarwood Sanctuary Choir
Soloists, and Orchestra

Majora canamus
“Let us sing greater things”
(Virgil, Eclogue IV)

And without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifested in the Flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.
(1 Timothy 3:16)

In Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
(Colossians 2:3)

The Messiah is an Oratorio (an opera on a Biblical theme without costumes or set) by George Frideric Handel. It is one of the most beloved works in all sacred music, written in 1741 during an intense period of inspiration that lasted just over three weeks. The text was compiled by Charles Jennens, who drew entirely from the Holy Scriptures to present the life, death, resurrection and reign of Jesus Christ. The quotes on the title page from Virgil and the Scriptures, were chosen by him to be the preface in the program to the first presentation of the Messiah in Dublin, April 1742 as a charitable benefit. From the time of that first performance, it has been cherished not simply as a musical masterpiece, but as a profound proclamation of the Gospel.

A devout Christian, Handel loved the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. The writing of the Messiah was a worship experience for him. His genius is displayed in how his music describes the texts. But his heart is displayed in his love for the Word of God. He said that while composing the “Hallelujah” chorus, he felt as though he had “seen heaven opened.”ⁱ In the sunset of Handel’s life, he expressed a desire that he would go to heaven on Good Friday, “to meet his good God, his sweet Lord and Savior on the day of His Resurrection.”ⁱⁱ Handel died on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter, April 14, 1759, just one day after the 17th anniversary of the premiere performance of the Messiah.

Every Word you will hear sung tonight comes from the Scriptures. Those Words are printed in this program along with some occasional supplemental Scripture texts and a “Conductor’s Commentary”, which will give you a glimpse of how I interpreted this work musically and Biblically.

Above all, I am concentrating on what Jesus Christ Himself proclaimed, that “God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” I will be praying as I conduct “that He may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being . . . and may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:16-18).ⁱⁱⁱ

That’s what tonight is all about.

Blessings on you as you worship with us.

John Haines
Pastor of Worship

THE INTRODUCTION

Overture:

Orchestra

Conductor’s Commentary: Overtures to Oratorios are musical prologues. They give a musical introduction of the themes and contexts that you, as a listener will be hearing.

Adagio

Conductor’s Commentary: As a conductor, this represents the Passion of Christ: that is, all that my Beautiful Savior, Jesus Christ suffered to take the punishment that I deserve, “becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8).

Allegro

Conductor’s Commentary: This represents Hope in Christ in my musical interpretation, anticipating the closing moments of the Oratorio, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

PART I: GOD PROMISES THE MESSIAH

Comfort ye my people

Joby Hurst, Tenor

Isaiah 40:1-3

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. 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."

Every valley shall be exalted

Brad Diamond, Tenor

Isaiah 40:4

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain:

And the glory of the Lord

Choir

Isaiah 40:5

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

And He shall purify

Choir

Malachi 3:3

And He shall purify the sons of Levi, they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Conductor's Commentary: Although God's people and their ministers have soiled themselves in the grossest of sins, God promises to make them so pure, that their offering before Him will be perfect, beautiful and acceptable to Him. Despite how bad the state of the American church may seem to be, this is God's promise. And here is how He does it: Their offering is not themselves, their talents or their attempts to be good people. It's too late for those things. Their offering is far better and the Father is delighted to receive it. Their offering is Jesus Christ. "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Behold, a virgin shall conceive

Elizabeth Cox, Alto

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel: God with us.

Conductor's Commentary: The humanity of Jesus Christ means that God has actually come among mankind to reveal Himself. "If Jesus Christ were not man as well as God, that would mean that God had not actually come all the way to man. It would mean God was still far away from us, as far as the heaven is from the earth. The stark actuality of Christ's humanity, his flesh and blood and bone, guarantees to us that we have God among us."^{iv}

O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion

Elizabeth Cox, soloist and Choir

Isaiah 40:9; Isaiah 60:1

O Thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, 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.

For unto us a Child is born

Choir

Isaiah 9:6

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.

Conductor's Commentary: There are some who believe Jesus was a good man but not God. But Jesus Himself said He was God, "Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:9). "If Christ is not God, then the love of Christ is not identical with God's love, and so we do not know that God is love. If Christ is not God, then Jesus is made out to be a liar, and we are all hopelessly out to sea. But Jesus Christ is God. And that means that God Himself has come to save us. The fact that Christ is God means that our salvation in Christ is anchored in eternity; that it is more sure than the heavens."v

PART II: THE MESSIAH COMES TO EARTH

Pastoral Symphony

Orchestra

Conductor's Commentary: This is a musical interlude depicting the idyllic shepherds' scene on the night of Christ's birth.

There were shepherds abiding in the field

Carrie Turner, Soprano

Luke 2:8-13

There were shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. 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 Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying:

Glory to God in the highest

Choir

Luke 2:14

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light

Choir

Matthew 11:30

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

Conductor's Commentary: Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-29).

PART III: THE MESSIAH DIES ON THE CROSS

Behold the Lamb of God

John 1:29

Choir

Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

He was despised

Isaiah 53:3

Elizabeth Cox, Alto

He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Surely, He hath borne our griefs

Isaiah 53:4-5

Choir

*Surely, he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: He was bruised for our iniquities:
the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.*

And with His stripes we are healed

Isaiah 53:5

Choir

And with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray

Isaiah 53:6

Choir

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way;
and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

Thy rebuke hath broken His heart

Psalm 69:20

Brad Diamond, 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.*

Conductor's Commentary: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, willingly undertook upon Himself God's rebuke. He did this to glorify God and out of His great love for us. In doing so, He suffered "the most grievous torments immediately in His soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death yet saw no corruption".^{vi}

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow

Lamentations 1:12

Brad Diamond, Tenor

Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow.

Conductor's Commentary: The sorrow that Jesus Christ experienced was infinitely more torturous than anything we could conceive. But because of that horrific sorrow He experienced, there is no sorrow that has the ability to destroy God's children or His Church. He promises victory. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

He was cut off out of the land of the living

Isaiah 53:8

Carrie Turner, Soprano

He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of Thy people was He stricken.

PART IV THE MESSIAH'S MESSAGE OF VICTORY

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell

Psalms 16:10

Carrie Turner, Soprano

But Thou didst not leave His soul in hell; nor didst Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates

Psalms 24:7-10

Choir

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.

Unto which of the angels said He at any time

Hebrews 1:5

Joby Hurst, Tenor

Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

The Lord gave the Word

Psalms 68:11

Choir

The Lord gave the Word: great was the company of the preachers.

How beautiful are the feet

Isaiah 52:7; Romans 10:15

Carrie Turner, Soprano

How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace; and bring glad tidings of good things!

Their sound is gone out into all lands

Choir

Romans 10:18; Psalm 19:4

Their sound is gone out into all lands. And their Words unto the ends of the world.

He that dwelleth in heaven

Tom Horner, Tenor

Psalm 2:4

He that dwelleth in heaven, shall laugh them to scorn. The Lord shall have them in derision.

Thou shalt break them

Tom Horner, Tenor

Psalm 2:9

Thou shalt break them in pieces with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Hallelujah

Choir

Revelation 19:6; 11:15; and 19:16

Hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. King of kings and Lord of lords, Hallelujah!

Conductor's Commentary: "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory. (Revelation 19:6-7)

PART V: THE MESSIAH CONQUERS DEATH THROUGH HIS RESURRECTION

Since by man came death

Choir

1 Corinthians 15:21-22

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.

Conductor's Commentary: Jesus Christ sits at the Right Hand of God the Father Almighty in a real resurrected body. Believers in Jesus will have resurrected bodies just like His. It is not metaphor. It is fact. And all of Christianity rests on it. "We testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15: 13-20).

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

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: The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Conductor's Commentary: One of the most beautiful summaries of what the Scriptures teach will happen to Believers in Jesus Christ when they die, is found in the Westminster Larger Catechism which says, "Immediately after death, their souls are made perfect in holiness, and received into the highest heavens, where they behold the Face of God in Light and Glory; waiting for the full redemption of their bodies, which even in death continue united to Christ, and rest in their graves, as in their beds, till on the Last Day they are united again with their souls."^{vii}

But thanks be to God

Choir

1 Corinthians 15:57

But thanks be to God, Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION: THE MESSIAH'S ETERNAL REIGN WITH HIS PEOPLE

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain

Choir

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.

Amen

Choir

Revelation 5:14

Amen!

Conductor's Commentary: "And the four living beings said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (Revelation 5:14 & 2 Corinthians 1:20).

ⁱ John Mainwaring, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1760).

ⁱⁱ Victor Schœlcher, *The Life of Handel* (London: Trübner & Co., 1857).

ⁱⁱⁱ Messiah lyrics are direct quotes or adaptations from the KJV Bible. All other quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway.

^{iv} T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 184–85.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 188.

^{vi} Westminster Confession of Faith 8/iv.

^{vii} Westminster Larger Catechism #86 (adapted).