

A solis ortus cardine

Variations on a 5th-Century Christmas Hymn

for SATB Choir (divisi)

Music by
John Muehleisen

Text from
A poem by Sedulius
(d. circa 450)

Commissioned by the South Bend Chamber Singers
Nancy Menk, conductor

Latin

**A solis ortus cardine
Adusque terrae limitem
Christum canamus Principem,
Natum Maria Virgine.**

**Beatus auctor saeculi
Servile corpus induit,
Ut carne carnem liberans
Ne perderet quos condidit.**

**Castae parentis viscera
Caelestis intrat gratia;
Venter puellae bajulat
Secreta, quae non noverat.**

**Domus pudici pectoris
Templum repente fit Dei;
Intacta nesciens virum
Concepit alvo Filium.**

**Enititur puerpera
Quem Gabriel praedixerat,
Quem ventre matris gestiens
Baptista clausum senserat.**

**Feno iacere pertulit,
Praesepe non abhorruit,
Et lacte modico pastus est,
Per quem nec ales esurit.**

**Gaudet chorus caelestium,
Et Angeli canunt Deo,
Palamque fit pastoribus
Pastor, Creator omnium.**

- Sedulius (d. circa 450)

English Translation

*From the land where the sun rises
to the ends of the earth
let us sing of Christ the King
born of the virgin Mary.*

*The blessed creator of the world
put on a slave's body,
so that, freeing flesh by flesh,
he would not lose all that He had created.*

*Into the womb of the chaste mother
enters heavenly grace;
the maiden's womb bears
a secret she does not understand.*

*The house of a chaste heart
suddenly becomes the temple of God;
she who was untouched, without knowing a man
conceived in her womb a Son.*

*The expectant woman has given birth
to Him who was predicted by Gabriel,
Who, in His mother's womb was recognized by
the Baptist, shut in [his own mother's womb] exulting.*

*He endured lying upon hay,
did not abhor the manger,
and was fed on a little milk,
He through whom not even a bird goes hungry.*

*The heavenly chorus rejoices
and the angels sing of God,
there is revealed to shepherds
the Shepherd, the Creator of all things.*

- English Translation by John Muehleisen

Program Notes

A solis ortus cardine is a set of nine variations and a coda based on the Gregorian chant for the 5th-century Christmas hymn "A solis ortus cardine" by the early Christian poet Sedulius (d. circa 450). The overall shape of the piece comprises a movement from "darkness to light," playing on scriptural references and images in the hymn itself to the Incarnation piercing the darkness and bringing light into the world. This is reflected harmonically in the music by a movement from the single, unadorned chant melody to lush harmony and from generally minor chords to major ones. Rhythmically, it is reflected by a move from the free, irregular rhythms of the chant through more regular meters in the middle, culminating in a dance-like final set of variations and coda, ending triumphantly with musical allusions to the brightness of the sunrise referred to at the beginning of the hymn and to the heavenly and earthly singing referred to several times in the hymn.

After the theme is stated in the form of the original Gregorian chant sung by women only, the variations are grouped as follows: Variations I–III, Variation IV, Variations V–VI, Variations VII–IX, and Coda. **Variations I & II** gradually move beyond the simple melody of the chant by "piling up" notes of the chant tune into increasingly brighter chords that represent the growing light of the dawn implied in the opening stanza of the hymn. The chords reach the brightest sonority at the end of the 2nd variation. **Variation III** takes the form a chorale with chant tune in the sopranos, and the chant itself interjected by the altos and baritones at the end of each phrase. The use of a chorale texture is in homage to Bach's use of a version of the chant tune as the basis for his chorales in the Cantata No. 121, *Christum wir sollen loben schon*, which is based textually on Luther's German paraphrase of Sedulius' 5th-century Latin hymn. **Variation IV** fulfills a transitional role that intensifies the movement from Dark to Light. In it we finally hear the text of the 2nd stanza of the hymn in the women's voices, while the men continue using the text of the opening stanza. The superimposition of these two verses represents two of the most basic aspects of the Incarnation, Christ's dual natures: fully God and fully human. The 2nd half of Variation IV makes the transition from darkness to light even more obvious. This section opens with two textless passages representing the sunrise, each passage starting with minor chords that grow brighter as they ascend from basses to sopranos and add more colorful notes to the sonorities. The variation ends with brilliant chords to the text "Christum canamus Principem, Natum Maria Virgine" ("Let us sing of Christ the King, born of the Virgin Mary").

In **Variations V–VI**, as if in response to the last line of verse two, the subject of the text shifts from Christ to His mother Mary, with the predominant image being that of the womb, as well as other images of the interior life of the heart. Accordingly, I created a more tender musical expression meant to reflect the intimacy and warmth of the images in stanzas 3 & 4. As the text anticipates the brightness of the Nativity and the Incarnation, the harmonies become more lush and bright. Variation V presents the chant almost literally in the sopranos, while in Variation VI the soprano solo carries the melodic burden of the first two lines of Variation VI, developing the chant melody through octave displacement and further chromatic inflections that subtly vary the melodic line. On the third line of the stanza, the chant melody shifts to the men, a shift that is primarily based on the reference in the text to Mary being "untouched" and "not knowing a man." **Variations VII–IX** form a celebratory, dancelike "finale" to the overall work as it announces the birth of Christ. **Variation VII** (verse five) musically portrays the leaping of John the Baptist in his mother's womb during Mary's meeting with John's mother Elizabeth, represented by syncopated cross-rhythms and upwardly surging melodic lines (derived from the opening line of the chant). The other phrases of the chant are present as well, albeit transformed significantly by the dancelike quality of the music. **Variation VIII** (verse six) returns to the more intimate lyrical mood of Variations V–VI, portraying the scene in the manger with Christ laying on the hay and His feeding at Mary's breast (note the amazing paradoxical image of Christ as both the one who is fed and the one who feeds all, even the birds). **Variation IX** (verse 7) is perhaps the most overtly celebratory verse in the text—particularly with the opening word "Gáudet" ("rejoice"). This verse summarizes the grand Nativity scene of the singing of the Heavenly chorus while the shepherds watch the scene unfold below. Accordingly, the music returns to the dancelike quality of Variation VII, and even quotes the familiar and oft-set melody *Gaudete Christus est natus* ("Rejoice! Christ is born!"). After the quotation, the music further develops the melodic, dancelike material from the opening of Var. VII, eventually building layer upon layer of texture and leading directly into the **Coda**, which consists of two sections, both of which are restatements of music from earlier variations. First, a forte, Maestoso statement of the music from Variation III, followed by a reprise of the Dawn music from the 2nd half of Variation IV. Together, these sections reinforce the movement from darkness to light by reprising the "brightest" melodic and harmonic material from earlier in the work, bringing the piece to a triumphant close with bright sonorities that represent the triumph of Light over Darkness.

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Variations on a 5th-Century Christmas Hymn

Commissioned by the South Bend Chamber Singers, Nancy Menk, conductor

Sedulius (d. circa 450)

John Muehleisen

2011

Theme
Freely $\text{♩} = 68$
mf

Soprano
A só-lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad-us - que tér - rae lí - mi-tem, Chris-tum__ ca -

Alto
A só-lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad-us - que tér - rae lí - mi-tem, Chris-tum__ ca -

Tenor

Bass

Piano *
Freely $\text{♩} = 68$
mf

* Piano is for rehearsal only

8

Var. I
Misterioso $\text{♩} = 54$ freely
pp

S
ná - mus Prín-ci - pem, Ná-tum Ma-rí - a__ Vir-gi-ne. Ooo

A
ná - mus Prín-ci - pem, Ná-tum Ma-rí - a__ Vir-gi-ne. Ooo

T
Ooo

B
Ooo

Pno
8
Misterioso $\text{♩} = 54$ freely
pp

16 *pp*

S
Ooo

A
Ooo

T
Ooo

B
Ooo

Pno

Var. II
Con Moto ♩ = 62

22 *mf* *poco rall.* *f* *mf*

S
Ooo A só-lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad-us - que

A
Ooo A só-lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad-us - que

T
Ooo A só-lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad-us - que

B
Ooo A só-lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad-us - que

Pno

22 *mf* *poco rall.* *f* *mf*

28 *poco rall.* **f** *mf* *poco rall.* **f** 3

S
 tér - rae lí - mi - tem, Chris - tum ca - ná - mus Prín - ci - pem,

A
 tér - rae lí - mi - tem, Chris - tum ca - ná - mus Prín - ci - pem,

T
 tér - rae lí - mi - tem, Chris - tum ca - ná - mus Prín - ci - pem,

B
 tér - rae lí - mi - tem, Chris - tum ca - ná - mus Prín - ci - pem,

Pno

34 *poco rall.* **f** *mf* **f** *mf*

Var. III (Chorale)
Maestoso ♩ = 56

S
 Ná - tum Ma - rí - a Ví - r - gi - ne. Ma - rí - a A só - lis or - tus cár - di - ne

A
 Ná - tum Ma - rí - a Ví - r - gi - ne. Alto 1 A só - lis or - tus cár - di -

T
 Ná - tum Ma - rí - a Ví - r - gi - ne. A só - lis or - tus cár - di - ne

B
 Ná - tum Ma - rí - a Ví - r - gi - ne. Bass A só - lis or - tus cár - di - ne

Pno

39 *mf* *f* *mf* *f*

S Ad-us-que tér - rae lí-mi-tem, Chris-tum ca -

A *f* *f* Ad-us-que tér - rae lí-mi-tem, *mf* *f*
mf *mf* *f* Ad-us-que tér - rae lí - mi - tem, Chris - tum ca -

T *mf* *f* *mf* *f*
 8 Ad-us-que tér - rae lí-mi-tem, Chris-tum ca -

B *f* *f* Ad-us-que tér - rae lí-mi-tem, *f* Ad-us-que tér - rae lí - mi-tem,
mf *mf* *mf* *f* Chris-tum ca -

Pno *f* *mf* *f* *mf*

45 *mf* *f* *f* *f*

S ná - mus Prín-ci - pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vir-gi-ne.

A ná - mus Prín-ci - pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vir-gi-ne.

T ná - mus Prín-ci - pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vir-gi-ne.

B ná - mus Prín-ci - pem, Prín-ci - pem, Ná-tum Ma-rí - a Vir-gi-ne.
f *f* *f* *f*

Pno *mf* *f* *f* *f*

Var. IV

49 **Con Moto** ♩ = 60

f

S *f* Be - á - tus áuc - tor saé - cu - li

A *f* Be - á - tus áuc - tor saé - cu - li

T *mp* *f* *mf* *f*
A só - lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad - us - que tér - rae

B *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *f*
A só - lis or - tus cár - di - ne Ad - us - que tér - rae

49 **Con Moto** ♩ = 60

Pno *mp* *mf* *f* *mf* *f*
R.H. Take with L.H. Take upstem notes with R.H.

53 **Con Moto** ♩ = 60

S Solo Sop. *f* Ah *f* Tutti Sop. 1 *f*
All others *f* Ser - ví - le cór - pus ín - du - it Sop. 2 Ut

A *f* Ser - ví - le cór - pus ín - du - it Ut

T *mf* *f* *mf*
lí - mi - tem, Chris - tum ca - ná - mus Prín - ci - pem,

B *mf* *f* *mf*
lí - mi - tem, Chris - tum ca - ná - mus Prín - ci - pem,

53 **Con Moto** ♩ = 60

Pno *f* *mf* *f* *mf*

6

S *f* *mf*
 cár - ne cár - nem lí - be - rans, Ne_ pér - de - ret quos cón - di - dit.

A *f* *mf*
 cár - ne cár - nem lí - be - rans, Ne_ pér - de - ret quos cón - di - dit.

T *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *mf*
 Ná - tum Ma - rí - a Vir - gi - ne.

B *f* *mf* *f* *mf* *f* *mf*
 Ná - tum Ma - rí - a Vir - gi - ne.

Pno *f*

64 (Sunrise: Light pierces the Darkness) *mf* *f* *a tempo* ♩ = 60 *mf* *f* *acc.*

S Ah Ah

A *mf* *f* *mf* *f*
 Ah Ah

T *mp* *f* *mp* *f*
 Ah Ah

B *mp* *f* *mp* *f*
 Ah Ah

Pno *mp* *mf* *f* *mp* *mf* *f* *acc.*

Slightly Faster $\text{♩} = 64$

70 *ff*

S Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

A *ff*

A Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

T *ff*

8 Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

B *ff*

B Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

Pno *ff*

70 Slightly Faster $\text{♩} = 64$

77 *mf* non rall. *mp* *p* G.P.

S Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - - - gi - ne.

A *mf* Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - - - gi - ne. *mp* *p* G.P.

T *mf* non dim. G.P.

8 Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - - - gi - ne. Ma - rí - a Ma - rí - a Ma - rí - a

B *mf* *mp* *p* G.P.

B Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - - - gi - ne.

Pno *mf* non rall. *mp* *p* G.P.

77 *mf* G.P.

8 Var. V Warmly ♩ = 60

S *p*
Cás-tae Cás-tae Pa - rén - tis vis - ce - ra Cae - lés - tis ín - trat grá - ti - a

A *p*
Cás-tae Cás-tae Pa - rén - tis vis - ce - ra Cae - lés - tis ín - trat grá - a

T *p*
Cás-tae Cás-tae Pa - rén - tis vis - ce - ra Cae - lés - tis ín - trat grá - ti - a

B *p*
Cás-tae Cás-tae Pa - rén - tis vis - ce - ra Cae - lés - tis ín - trat grá - ti - a

Pno Warmly ♩ = 60
p

S *mf*
Vén-ter pu - él - lae bá-ju - lat Se-cré-ta,

A *mf*
Vén-ter pu - él - lae bá-ju - lat Se-cré -

T *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp*
Chris-tum Chris-tum Ná-tum

B *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp*
Chris-tum Chris-tum Ná-tum

Pno *mf*

Var. VI

Tenderly $\text{♩} = 64$

Solo Sop. *mf*

96

S
 quae non nó-ve-rat. _____ Dó - mus _____ pu-dí-ci _____ péc - tor - is _____

A
 ta, _____ *mf* > *mp* Dó-mus _____ *mf* > *mp* Dó-mus _____

T
 _____ *mf* > *mp* Dó-mus _____ *mf* > *mp* Dó-mus _____

B
 _____ *mf* > *mp* Dó-mus _____ *mf* > *mp* Dó-mus _____

Pno
 96 Tenderly $\text{♩} = 64$ *mf*

102

S
 _____ Tém - plum re - pén - te _____ fit _____ Dé-i _____ In - tác-ta _____ *Tutti* > *mp*

A
mf > *mp* Tém-plum _____ fit _____ Dé-i _____ In - tác-ta _____ *mp*

T
 Tém-plum _____ fit _____ Dé-i _____ In - tác - ta nés-ci - *Solo Tenor* *mf*

B
mf > *mp* Tém-plum _____ fit _____ Dé-i _____ *mf*

Pno
 102

mp *mf* *rall.*

S *mp* *mf* *rall.*
 vir - um, Con-cé - pit ál - vo Fí - li - um.

A *mp* *mf* *rall.*
 vir - um, Con-cé - pit ál - vo Fí - li - um.

T *mf* *mf* *mp*
 ens vir - um, Con-cé - pit

B *mf* *mp*
 Con-cé - pit

Pno *rall.*

Var. VII

112 **Gioioso** ♩ = 120 *f*

S *f*
 En - í - ti - tur pu - ér - pe - ra Quem Gá - bri - el prae - díx - e - rat, Quem vén - tre má - tris

A *f*
 En - í - ti - tur pu - ér - pe - ra Quem Gá - bri - el prae - díx - e - rat, Quem vén - tre má - tris

T *Tutti f*
 En - í - ti - tur pu - ér - pe - ra Quem Gá - bri - el prae - díx - e - rat, Quem vén - tre má - tris

B *f*
 En - í - ti - tur pu - ér - pe - ra Quem Gá - bri - el prae - díx - e - rat,

Pno *f*

118

S gés-ti - ens Ah

A gés-ti - ens Ah

T gés-ti - ens Bap - tís - ta Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum sén-se-rat.

B Bap - tís - ta Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum sén-se-rat.

Pno

123

S Bap - tís - ta Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum sén-se-rat.

A Bap - tís - ta Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum sén-se-rat.

T Bap - tís - ta Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum sén-se-rat.

B Bap - tís - ta Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum Bap-tís-ta cláu - sum sén-se-rat.

Pno

Var. VIII

12

Lirico $\text{♩} = 120$

mf dolce, tenero

S *mf dolce, tenero*
Foé-no ja - cé - re pér-tu-lit, _____ Prae - sé - pe non ab - hór - ru - it _____ Et

A *mf dolce, tenero*
Foé-no ja - cé - re pér-tu-lit, _____ Prae - sé - pe non ab - hór - ru - it _____ Et

T *mf dolce, tenero*
Foé-no ja - cé - re pér-tu-lit, _____ Prae - sé - pe non ab - hór - ru - it _____

B *mf dolce, tenero*
Foé-no ja - cé - re pér-tu-lit, _____ Prae - sé - pe non ab - hór - ru - it _____

Pno *mf dolce, tenero*
128

S 136
lác - te mó - di - cō pás - tus est, _____

A 136
lác - te mó - di - co pás - tus est, _____

T *mf*
8
Per quem nec á - les _____ é - su - rit.

B *mf*
Per quem nec á - les _____ é - su - rit.

Pno 136

Var. IX

Energico (alla danza) $\text{♩} = 120$

f * see note

S
Gáu-det Gáu-det chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o Gáu-det Gáu-det

f * see note

A
Gáu-det Gáu-det chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o Gáu-det Gáu-det

f * see note

T
Gáu-det Gáu-det chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o Gáu-det Gáu-det

f * see note

B
Gáu-det Gáu-det chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o Gáu-det Gáu-det

f * see note

Pno
Gáu-det Gáu-det chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o Gáu-det Gáu-det

ff

* Note: All X-shaped noteheads in this section represent some combination of clapping, tambourine, hand drum, and/or bass drum. Feel free to choose whatever works best for your ensemble and in the performance space. Optionally you could also substitute a simple rest.

152

S
chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o

A
chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o

T
chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o

B
chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o Pa - lám - que fit pas -

152

Pno
chó - rus cae-lés - ti-um, Et An-ge-li cá - nunt Dé - o Pa - lám - que fit pas -

mf

158

S *f* Pa - lám - que fit pas - tó - ri - bus

A *f* Pa - lám - que fit pas - tó - ri - bus

T *mf* Pa - lám - que fit pas - tó - ri - bus *f* Pa - lám - que fit pas - tó - ri - bus

B *mf* tó - ri - bus *f* Pa - lám - que fit pas - tó - ri - bus Pa - lám - que fit pas - tó - ri - bus

Pno *mf* *f*

Coda
Maestoso $\text{♩} = 60$

163

S *ff* Pás - tor, Cre - á - tor óm - ni - um. Ad - us - que tér - rae.

A *ff* Pás - tor, Cre - á - tor óm - ni - um. A só - lis or - tus cár - di - ne *ff* Ad - us - que tér - rae

T *ff* Pás - tor, Cre - á - tor óm - ni - um. Ad - us - que tér - rae.

B *ff* Pás - tor, Cre - á - tor óm - ni - um. A só - lis or - tus cár - di - ne *ff* Ad - us - que tér - rae.

Pno *ff*

170 *ff*

S
li - mi-tem, _____ Chris-tum _____ ca - ná - mus_

A
li - mi-tem, _____ Ad-us-que tér - rae lí - mi-tem, _____ *ff* Chris - tum _____ ca - ná - mus_

T
8
li - mi-tem, _____ Chris-tum _____ ca - ná - mus_

B
li - mi-tem, _____ Ad-us-que tér - rae lí - mi-tem, _____ *ff* Chris - tum _____ ca - ná - mus_

Pno

175

S
Prín-ci - pem, _____ Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vir-gi-ne. _____

A
Prín-ci - pem, _____ Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vir-gi-ne. _____

T
8
Prín-ci - pem, _____ Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vir-gi-ne. _____

B
Prín-ci - pem, _____ Prín-ci - pem, _____ Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vir-gi-ne. _____

Pno

16 **Slightly Faster** $\text{♩} = 64$ *accel.* ----- *a tempo* $\text{♩} = 64$ *accel.* -----

182 *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

S Ah Ah

A Ah Ah

T 8 Ah Ah

B Ah Ah

Pno *f* *ff* *f* *ff*

a tempo $\text{♩} = 64$

188 *ff* *ff* *ff* *ff*

S Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

A Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

T 8 Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

B Chris-tum ca - ná-mus Prin-ci-pem, Ná-tum Ma - rí - a Vír - gi - ne.

Pno *ff* *ff*

a tempo $\text{♩} = 64$