

Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frederick Handel and Henry Purcell Composers, 1750, 1759, 1695

Observed July 28

All born in the second half of the seventeenth century, these three giants of European musical history provided the seventeenth and eighteenth century Church (and all of us since) with extraordinary music which fills the heart and blesses the soul. Bach blessed the German church with cantatas intended to highlight the scripture readings for every Sunday and holy day of the Lutheran calendar. He also wrote superb settings for the Passion Story from Saint Matthew's and Saint John's Gospels for Holy Week worship. His many chorales (beautiful hymn settings) and Masses still provide inspiration and musical solace. Bach preached through his music, helping the faithful to experience the truth of Christian teaching through his music. Handel was also born in Germany, but became an English subject and created much of his most memorable work (including his masterwork, *The Messiah*) in English. He, too, had the gift of using his extraordinary musical talent to highlight the deeper meaning of the words in his texts so that people's spiritual lives are enriched by the experience of his music. Purcell lived a much shorter life than the others. In his short life he became the master of uniquely English baroque music. When he died in his mid-thirties he had already created an extraordinary body of church music, still delighting people today. He had been made organist of Westminster Abbey when only 20 years old, in tribute to his remarkable and precocious talent. The beautiful music he wrote for the funeral of Queen Mary was performed at his funeral and he was laid to rest beside the organ he played so well. Many people find their way to God along the path of music. Great composers have brought countless individuals who had been immune to intellectual persuasion to embrace a life of faith, and these three are surely among the greatest. All three have been appreciated by Christians of many persuasions, and have greatly enriched our Anglican tradition. Their music appears in prelude and postlude (music before and after worship), as well as choir pieces in Anglican worship all over. In our hymnal twenty hymns have tunes from Bach, five tunes from Handel, and #518 is from Purcell. We owe God great thanks for the gift of music these men have shared with all of us.

Lessons 2 Chronicles 7:1-6; Psalm 150; Colossians 2:2-6; Luke 2:8-14

Collect Almighty God, beautiful in majesty and majestic in holiness, who teaches us in Holy Scripture to sing your praises and who gave your musicians Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frederick Handel and Henry Purcell grace to show forth your glory in their music: Be with all those who write or make music for your people, that we on earth may glimpse your beauty and know the inexhaustible riches of your new creation in Jesus Christ our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*