

**Behold, I Stand at the Door and Knock**

Revelation 3:20-22

Chapel Sermon

December 15, 2000

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana

**B**ehold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me. He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”  
(Revelation 3:20-22)

At the Lutheran Homes, the elderly congregation sits for the entire service. Since liturgy is something we do, liturgical practices cannot ask of the people what they cannot do. Since our American Constitution begins “we the people,” all are equal and no one bows to another. Some years ago the White House chief of protocol almost lost her job when she curtsied before the British Sovereign. Even if genuflecting is not commanded, St. Paul says that the time is coming when every knee in heaven and earth and under the earth shall bow and confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. In heaven, genuflecting during the Creed is not an adiaphoron. Now to the controversy: Should we kneel at *incarnatus est*, “He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,” or at *homo factus est*, “He was made man.” Christmas answers the question.

Some medieval theologians held that even if Adam had not sinned, God would have become man. This meant *incarnatus est* was always in the mind of God from the beginning. Christmas was not an afterthought. God’s transcendence never prevented Him from spending His evenings talking to His rational creatures in the garden. If the altar is our Jerusalem, so the church is that primordial garden in which God and we are in constant discourse with one another in preaching and liturgy. We socialize in the commons after chapel, because God created us to talk to Him and one another. God was never bothered with the Reformed dictum—the finite is not capable of the infinite—because He was never infinite in the way the theologians said He was. Incarnation was not awkward, foreign, or alien for God. God was like man and man was like God. Even without sin, God’s

evening walks were never intended to be the last chapter. His goal was, in every sense, to be Emmanuel, “God with us.” If we had not sinned, parts of the Book of Revelation would have become the third chapter of Genesis but without the enthroned Lamb sacrificed for sin. Divine majesty radiates through the *incarnatus est*. Mercy for helpless sinners is enshrined in the humiliation of Jesus, *homo factus est*. God does become Emmanuel, as He intended, *incarnatus est*, but now it must be completed by humiliation and death, *homo factus est*. “He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as One from whom men hide their faces He was despised.” *Incarnatus est* is Christ’s transfigured glory. *Homo factus est* means that the God who appeared at Sinai in unapproachable glory “emptied Himself [in Jesus], took on the form of a servant, [was born] in the likeness of men. And...He humbled Himself and became obedient unto...death on a cross.”

At Christmas you and most Christians are reluctant to leave the *incarnatus est* for the *homo factus est*. Christmas is your Egypt. Lent is your wilderness. God’s glory is delicious nectar. His degradation is distasteful. Remain in Bethlehem and pretend there is no Golgotha. Christmas is everyone’s holiday. Why not? God becomes one of us: *incarnatus est*. But unless *homo factus est* with crucifixion, death, and burial follow *incarnatus est*, our Christmas is hollow and our Christianity is a pretense.

Christmas is the triple holiday. The Son of God is eternally born of His Father. “God from God, Light from Light, the true God who forever comes out of the true God.” Secondly, Christmas is the holiday of the *incarnatus est*. The perfect union between God and man, which was anticipated in garden’s evening conversations, has finally taken place in Jesus who is both God and Man. Thirdly, and for us sinners what is most important, Christmas is the holiday of the *homo factus est*: “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” In Jesus of Nazareth God not only shares our misery but experiences it in a way that no one else ever has. In the cry of dereliction, “*Eli, Eli lama sabachtani*,” the One who is abandoned by God proves Himself to be Emmanuel, God with us.

But at Christmas we are more than observers of the courtroom in which God and man exchange places. It is more than heaven and earth being united in Jesus; we ourselves are the divine mysteries because God unites us with Him in Jesus. Flesh and blood, which cannot inherit the kingdom of

God, become the garment in which the eternal God clothes Himself: *homo factus est*. By incarnation Christ takes our tainted flesh and blood—He was made sin—and transfigures it into God’s flesh and blood—”the Word was made flesh”—and then He returns that same flesh and blood to us in the Sacrament, so that our flesh and blood can be transfigured into His. Something happens in the incarnation: God becomes man. Something happens in the Eucharist: Bread becomes the God-Man Jesus Christ. And something happens in us when we receive the Eucharist. That God-Man becomes one with us. Already fulfilled is Isaiah’s prophecy, “Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,” but the Emmanuel prophecy reaches a further fulfillment, when in receiving the sacramental bread, we cry out “Emmanuel,” “God with us.” In Bethlehem, God takes our flesh and blood and is born on earth. In the Eucharist, we eat His flesh and blood and are born in heaven. Bethlehem is Christ’s Christmas. The Sacrament is our Christmas. “O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.”

Christmas is Christmas not because we come to God, but because God comes to us. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me.” The Sacrament is the door through which Christ enters. He alone presides at the table. His flesh and blood alone is our meat and drink. The one who eats His flesh and drinks His blood knows and experiences in himself what is meant by the words, “the Word made flesh.” “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me.” “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Merry Christmas!