

“Of the Father’s Love Begotten”

The Son of God begets sons of God

Psalm 2:7; Luke 1:26-35; John 1:12-14

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • December 23, 2018

Dear Congregation of Christ: In the fullness of time, thousands of years after Adam and Eve sinned, God finally fulfilled his promise to send the Son of the woman to crush the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). Two thousand years ago, God sent his Son, born of a virgin woman descended from Adam’s wife Eve. He was “*born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as son*” (Gal 4:4).

Before he even laid the foundation of the world, God had already designed a plan to redeem his son Adam from the curse of sin and death. From eternity past, this design was for God and his people to be in perfect fellowship in the place he has prepared for them in eternity future: a new heaven and a new earth. But how will God fulfill this eternal purpose? It is through his Son.

This is why the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinitarian God, is the main character in the divine drama from Genesis to Revelation. *Yahweh* or *I AM* or *LORD* – appeared in human form in several accounts in the Old Testament, centuries before his birth in Bethlehem. In Genesis 18:22-26, Abraham spoke to one of the three men who appeared to him under the oaks at Mamre (22-26). This man was called Yahweh or LORD, the name of God (18:22-26). In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestled with a man who revealed himself to be God (24-25, 28-30).

God also appeared as a man called “*the Angel of the LORD*” in a few instances. In the book of Judges, he appeared to Gideon, and was also called LORD (6:11-14). In Judges 13, he revealed to a barren woman that she would bear a son named Samson (3). This Angel revealed his name as *Wonderful* – one of the names of God (18) – so the husband feared they would die because they have seen God (22). The Angel of the LORD was also the Destroyer who slew 185,000 Assyrian invaders in 2 Kings 19:35. Since the One who killed all the firstborn of Egypt was called a “destroyer,” it’s conceivable that he was the Angel of the LORD.

Why would these human appearances of God and the Angel of the LORD be appearances of the Second Person of the Trinity? Because only the Second Person of the Trinity assumed human form when he was born in Bethlehem hundreds of years later. God the Father and God the Holy Spirit never assumed human form. And this Second Person of the Trinity is revealed as the Son of God, the Incarnate God.

The Son of God in the Law of Moses

During the time of Jesus, the Old Testament was divided into three sections: the Law of Moses, the Psalms or Writings, and the Prophets. The Law of Moses consisted of the first five books, but also included all the historical books from Joshua to Esther. As mentioned earlier, the first revelation of the Son of God was in the Garden of Eden, where he is the Son of Eve who would crush the

serpent's head. Adam himself is called "the son of God" in Luke 3:38, but in the sense of God as Creator and Adam as creature.

In the Law of Moses, the most significant reference to the Son of God is in God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:7, "*Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'*" God promised Abraham a Seed or Offspring, whom the Apostle Paul revealed as Christ, "*Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring... who is Christ*" (Gal 3:16).

Adam is not the only man called a "son" by God. Not many people think of Israel as God's son, but God tells Pharaoh, "*Israel is my firstborn son*" (Exo 4:22). God is affirming his covenant with Abraham that he would have a multitude of children who would inherit a land of promise. In the Old Testament, firstborn sons have double share of the inheritance (Deu 21:17), and Israel had the choice portion, a land "*flowing with milk and honey*" (Exo 33:3). Paul says that Israel was a foretaste of the kingdom of God, whose citizens are "*Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise*" (Gal 3:29).

In the historical books, the most significant reference is to the Son is in God's covenant with King David in 2 Samuel 7. The LORD promised him a Son who would inherit his kingdom, and his kingdom would be established forever (2 Sam 7:12, 16). This is the same promise that God made to Mary about Jesus, "*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David... and of his kingdom there will be no end*" (Luke 1:32-33). The LORD also declared to David, "*I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son*" (14). Hebrews 1:5 then uses this verse to refer to Jesus as this Son.

The Son of God in the Psalms

When we go to the Psalms, we also find references to the Son of God, and there are two passages often quoted in the New Testament. In Psalm 2, we read that the seed of the devil in all the nations rebel against God and his Anointed (1-3). But God mocks them from heaven, saying, "*As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill... The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you'*" (6-7). Paul uses this verse when he declared in Acts 13:32-33 that the resurrection of Jesus is the good news that God has fulfilled his promise to their forefathers. God also confirms that Jesus is his Son in his baptism (Matt 3:17), and when Jesus appeared in glory in the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:35). In both events, God declared he is well-pleased with his beloved Son, because he would fulfill all of God's law from birth all the way to the cross. God seems to be saying he was not pleased with his other two sons, Adam and Israel, because they rebelled against him.

Therefore, John 3:16 declares that Jesus is God's "*only-begotten Son.*" The word "begotten" is a largely forgotten word in the Bible. Almost all modern translations, including the ESV and NIV, have dropped this word in favor of "one and only" because practically no one understands what "begotten" means in John 3:16. In so doing, the crucial meaning of "only-begotten Son" is lost.

What does "begotten" really mean? The word comes from a Greek word that combines "only" and "generate." Jesus as the only-begotten Son" means that he is the only one that was not created by God but was "generated" or co-existed with God from eternity. He had no beginning nor end.

Unlike all other human begetting, there was no physical procreation in Father “begetting” the son. One of the seemingly valid objections to “only-begotten Son” is that it implies that the Son had a beginning.¹ But from the 4th through the 21st centuries, only liberal theologians had a problem with the Nicene Creed, which stated:

[Jesus Christ] the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father...

Which is what the hymn also says, “Of the Father’s love begotten ere the worlds began to be, He is Alpha and Omega.” From eternity past, there was already a Father-Son relationship between God the Father and God the Son. Therefore, there was never a moment in eternity that the Son was not the Son of God.

The second major passage in the Psalms about the Son of God is in Psalm 110:1, “*The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool’*” Since King David wrote Psalm 110, and Jesus is the son of David, how can the Messiah be both David’s son and David’s Lord? It is because the Messiah already existed in eternity past as the Son of God. This was Jesus’ point that silenced the Jews who rejected him (Mark 12:35-37).

The Son of God in the Prophets

Now we go to the last portion of the Old Testament – the Prophets. What do they say about the Son of God?

The first passages that immediately come to mind are from Isaiah 7:14 and 9:6-7. Isaiah 7:14 promises a Son born of a virgin woman whose name would be “Immanuel,” which means “God with us,” a name fulfilled by Jesus at his birth (Matt 1:23). Isaiah 9:6 also promises a Son whose name would be called “*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*” This promise was fulfilled also when Jesus was born: “*the Son of the Most High... the Son of God*” (Luke 1:32, 35), and “*on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased*” (Luke 2:14).

Then comes two familiar passages in Daniel’s prophecy. In Daniel 3, Daniel’s three friends were thrown into a furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar’s men, but when he looked, he saw four men walking inside the furnace. And he said, “*the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods*” (25), most likely an appearance of the pre-incarnate Son of God. Then in Daniel 7, Daniel saw a vision of God and someone like a son of man, “*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.*” This is a vision of Jesus ascending into heaven to sit at God’s right hand. He will rule over the whole earth, and his kingdom will be an eternal kingdom (13-14). Jesus will fulfill this prophecy when he returns from heaven as the Son of Man “*coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Matt 24:30), and then “*all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him*” (Rev 1:7).

¹ R. Scott Clark, *Maybe Darryl Had A Point? Driscoll v. Catholic Creeds*, 12/13/2015.

<https://heidelblog.net/2013/12/maybe-darryl-had-a-point-driscoll-v-catholic-creeds/>. Accessed 12/21/2018.

We read earlier that God called Israel his firstborn son. The prophet Hosea confirms this when God told him, *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son”* (11:1). Matthew says that Jesus fulfilled this saying when Joseph and Mary returned with their infant son from Egypt after they fled Herod’s massacre of the infants in Bethlehem (Matt 2:15). Herod was fearful after the wise men from the east came looking for “the king of the Jews” to worship him. The king’s own wise men confirmed from Micah 5:2 that *“one who is to be ruler in Israel”* shall come from Bethlehem. And this ruler will be God himself because he comes *“from of old, from ancient days.”*

Dear friends: The ancient hymn that we learned earlier, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” is a song of praise to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It gives “high thanksgiving and unending praises, honor, glory, and dominion, and eternal victory” to Christ who was born to save his people from their sins.

God’s plan also included making a multitude of people from all nations and languages as his “children” (John 11:52), who are also called “sons of God.” In the Old Testament, the sons of God were the people of Israel. In the New Testament, the Son of God begets sons of God – children of God – when they believe in his name (John 1:12, 14). Those believers are predestined as sons (Eph 1:5), “peacemakers” (Matt 5:9), love their enemies (Luke 6:35), and are “above reproach” among a wicked world (Phil 2:15). While Jesus is the only-begotten Son, all who believe in him are adopted sons who have the right to call God “Father,” are indwelt by the Spirit. And when the Son of God returns from heaven, all the sons he has begotten will receive their heavenly inheritance (Gal 4:4-7).

When Christ returns as the Conquering Son of God and Son of Man, he will crush all his enemies including the devil. When that time comes, God would have accomplished what he had planned from creation: perfect communion between him and his people in a new heaven and new earth where his people will dwell with him “evermore and evermore!”