

“Jesus – The Begotten Son of God”



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We begin with a formal, universally understood definition of an easy word in Greek. The word is *gennao* (in modern Greek pronounced “yenaο”). Here is the simple definition provided by the *Theological Dictionary of the NT*, Vol. 1, p. 665:

“Gennao is used of the ‘begetting’ of the father and the ‘bearing’ of the mother, not only in Greek generally but also in the LXX [the Greek version of the OT] and in the New Testament.”

Why is this word so critically important for our understanding of who Jesus, the Son of God is? Simply because *gennao* is used to describe the coming into existence of the Son of God.

Now if you belong to an “orthodox” church, you are committed to believing that the Son of God never came into existence in time. He has always existed. He, the Son, had no beginning. He was “eternally begotten” by the Father. This concept is deeply rooted in the official understanding of the Son of God and this has been so for the past 1700 years!

“Eternal generation” will not stand up under a thoughtful investigation. That is to say, the word *gennao* in the Greek language, to beget, to father, to sire, to cause to come into existence, to give being to, cannot possibly mean an “eternal begetting.”

Some contemporary preachers are beginning to awake to the awful possibility that the Church in its hallowed creeds has been mistaken at a very fundamental level — that of defining Jesus Christ, Son of God, properly and honestly.

Here are the facts. Mark Driscoll writes, candidly and correctly: “The word ‘begotten’ unavoidably implies a beginning of the one begotten.” This is a staggeringly interesting admission. Yes, once we read that the Son of God, Jesus, was “begotten” we can automatically and safely — driven by the absolute facts of the language, Greek and English — conclude that the Son of God had a beginning in time, that he was “given being,” “caused to come into existence.”

These ordinary language facts drive the honest seeker for truth to the conclusion that there is no such biblical character as an “eternally begotten” Son. Eternity lies beyond time and “begetting” is our most important “timebound” word.

All human beings are begotten, generated, generation following generation. You can read a simple compelling list of the famous human beings begotten and born at the opening of Matthew’s Gospel. “Abraham begat Isaac” and so on for 40 generations. Similar family trees are recorded in the OT and the same easy word *gennao* is used to describe the beginning of a human person, the son of his father. In no case does “beget,” “father” cancel out its own meaning, stand itself on its head and mean that someone did NOT have a beginning in time!

The “theological” (the term is rather too flattering!) concept of “eternal begetting” is really a nonsense expression — not much better than hot ice cubes, married bachelors, or square circles. Someone recently observed that “machelors” and “squircles” are fictitious, if humorous, ideas. “What then would be a hot ice cube?” I asked a brilliant young student I was privileged to teach NT Greek to. Her answer was spontaneous: “a puddle!”

I want you to see that a number of honest Bible experts of top rank admit exactly what we are saying here. The idea of an “eternally begotten Son of God” is an invalid, impermissible one, and needs to be struck from the church records. Especially because we are all going to be judged by the words of Jesus, he said repeatedly and in the climactic summary in John 12:

Jesus said in a loud voice, “Whoever believes in me believes not only in me but also in Him who sent me. Whoever sees me sees also Him who sent me. I have come into the world as light so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. If anyone hears my Gospel message and does not obey it, I will not judge him. I came not to judge the world but to save it. Whoever rejects me and does not accept my Gospel message has one who will judge him. **The words I have spoken will be his judge on the last day!** This is true because I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has commanded me what I must say and speak. And I know that His command brings the Life of the Age to Come, immortality. What I say then is what the Father has told me to say” (John 12:44-50).

Are you ready for a challenge? The creeds of the Church are violently at odds with the Bible which we claim as our authority — on this very fundamental question of who is Jesus, Son of God. Again, Mark Driscoll: “Begotten unavoidably implies a beginning of the one begotten.” He means of course a beginning in time. The Son of God in Scripture is expressly and patently said to have a beginning in time.

Read it first in Matthew 1. After a list of 40 samples of “generations,” “begettings” “coming into existence,” “receiving being from a father,” we come to the breathtakingly fascinating account of how Jesus, the Son of God began to exist. The event is certainly not beyond the limits of time in eternity past!

Matthew wrote: “Now the **origin** of Jesus Christ happened like this: His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit...While [Joseph] pondered on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, fear not to take Mary, your wife, **for that which is begotten in her** is from Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18-20).

The question to be faced head on is this: When and where did the begetting (*gennaō*) take place? Obviously, in the womb of Mary, and as a creative, biological miracle produced by the creative spirit of God the Father. These are unarguable facts and we do well to accept them, for fear of judgment, as in the case of Zacharias, who failed to believe what the angel said. Angels, as direct emissaries of God, expect to be believed, and God, as Creator (in this case of His unique Son Jesus) demands our comprehending attention.

Here it is again: Thayer’s lexicon, referring to the beginning of the existence of the Son: “**to be begotten:** τό ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθῆναι: that which is **begotten** in her womb, Matt. 1:20.”

To be begotten is to be procreated, and the word **create** conveys the brilliantly illuminating truth that the Son is not an uncreated Person! He is brought into being and given existence as Son in Mary, by miracle. He is begotten, fathered and procreated by this most amazing historical event, so matchlessly and simply described by the narrative of Matthew 1:20 and repeated by 1 John 5:18, where exactly the same word, in the same passive form and tense, tells of the begetting, the beginning of existence of the Son of God, **as an event of past history**. He is truly the second Adam, the beginning of a brand new creation. He is the

head of the new race of humans destined for immortality. Jesus has pioneered that amazing destiny and has arrived at immortality. He beckons those who believe his amazing status, forward to the same indestructible life.

Now look at Acts 13:33 and Psalm 2:7. Treffry, *Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ*, on Psalm 2:7: “Today I have become your Father”:

“This passage occurs 4 times in the scriptures, three times cited in the NT (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5 and 5:5). Hence we are assured of its importance and significance and equally of its impressiveness, which last of course must depend on the clearness with which it enunciates the truth and the consequent facility with which its meaning would be apprehended. It cannot therefore be obscure or enigmatic, nor can its sense be remote or recondite [so Ps. 110:1], uncertain or ambiguous. A text possessing these characteristics would not be quoted so often, especially as is the fact, without an accompanying explanation.

“A second remark, still more obviously true, is that in its proper sense, it must be appropriate to each discourse in which it appears. Hence of several interpretations the one to be preferred is the one which is most fully adapted to the whole; while, on the other hand, such as are limited in their aptness to but one example of citation are strongly to be suspected, if not summarily dismissed.

“A third circumstance, not to be wholly passed over, is that in every instance the passage is addressed to Jews. Its exposition therefore must be conducted on the acknowledged principles of Jewish theology [this applies whether addressed to Jews or others]. No sense which would not be appreciated by a Jewish reader can be other than incorrect. These rules, it is presumed, are so evident as not to demand formal proof, and if duly regarded will save much useless labor...

“Is it supposable that by *generation* the holy spirit merely meant *appointment*; and that the phrase ‘I have begotten you,’ signifies only ‘I have constituted you’? The ideas of **generation and appointment are wholly dissimilar**; and with the utmost latitude of figure, it seems impossible to understand how the one can be designed to convey the other. Nor is this the only objection which the phraseology of the passage suggests. For if it is a prophecy merely derivative of the Messiahship, the term ‘today’ will signify the day of the actual consecration of our Lord by the anointing of the spirit. But this is at variance with the fact, for, before that event, it will on all hands be admitted that he was the Son of God. [Yes, but how long before?]

“This exposition is prohibited also by the second of the above rules. Not to go further it is altogether inapposite, for example, to the discourse before us. The Apostle has to prove the superiority of Christ to the angels; and in order to do this, he is supposed to quote the declaration of Yahweh ‘You are the Messiah; this day I have appointed you that office.’ But this proves nothing, except that the Messiah was a divinely commissioned person, which of course no Jew would ever question.

“Nothing then seems more evident than that the passage under consideration [Ps. 2:7] cannot describe the designation of our Redeemer in his office and work. This opinion does not in any aspect possess the smallest plausibility and may therefore be decisively dismissed.

“Other expositors represent the passage as a prophecy of **the resurrection of Christ**, an interpretation which makes God the father and the earth or the grave the mother of our Lord. Apart from every other objection, the harshness and offensiveness of such a figure would, it is apprehended, be conclusive against the opinion. But a not less palpable reason for its rejection is that it supposes Christ to have become the Son of God at the resurrection, **which is not the fact**. Or to have become so in some peculiar and eminent sense, which as we have before shown, is equally untenable. Every expression in the NT which gives emphasis to the divine Sonship **refers to a period before the resurrection**.

“There are two other expositions of the passage. In both it is referred to the divine sonship; and our preference, on whichever side it may be, will not therefore affect the main point of our enquiry. Of these, the first supposes the immediate object of the oracle to be the resurrection, considered as the evidence or *declaration* that Christ was truly and in a proper sense the Son of God. In this case, according to an allowable Hebraism, the passage will signify ‘You are my Son; this day (of the resurrection) I have declared (and by indubitable evidence demonstrated) your (proper and divine) sonship.’ With the second opinion, the passage generally is explained, according to **its literal sense**, as an absolute affirmation of our Lord’s divine and real Sonship. And unless there is some weighty reason for preferring the more remote [and less literal] sense, no doubt can be entertained that the second opinion is to be preferred.

“The only reason for the *declarative* sense is found in a part of Paul’s discourse at Antioch in Pisidia, recorded in Acts 13:16ff. The passage supposed to favor the declarative view is as follows: ‘And we declare to you glad tidings, how the promise which was made to the fathers, God has fulfilled the same to us their children, in that **he raised up Jesus again**, as it is also written in the second psalm, “You are my Son, this day I have begotten you.” And as concerning the fact that he raised him from the dead, never again to return to corruption, he spoke in this way: “I will give you the sure mercies of David.” Therefore he says in another psalm: “You will not allow your holy one to see corruption”’ (vv. 32-35). Here then it is supposed that the fulfillment of the prophecy is distinctly referred to our Lord’s resurrection.

“But this may be rationally doubted. **The word *again* (v. 33) has been inserted by our translators without any sufficient warrant [translations are tricking you!]**, while the participle, *anastesas*, ‘**raised up**’ does by no means necessarily suggest the resurrection. In fact when the verb does have the sense of resurrection, it is usually connected with some determining phrase, such as ‘from the dead.’ Otherwise its meaning simply is to raise up, or passively to be raised up. This is the general, if not the invariable usage throughout Luke’s narrative. (For example see Acts 3:22, 26; 5:6, 17, 34, etc.) More particularly, Peter, in his discourse on the day of Pentecost, speaks of God having promised to raise up Christ (*anastesein*) to sit on the throne of David (Acts 2:30). So also in the prediction of the great prophet (Deut. 18:15-18) the word is twice employed with the same purpose by the LXX and this passage is quoted by the same Apostle on another occasion (Acts 3:22). In these examples the reference is *6 Focus on the Kingdom* obviously **NOT to the resurrection**, but to the natural production and the official elevation of Christ.

“Throughout the whole of the discourse in the synagogue at Antioch, in the use of this and the synonymous word *egeire*, the Apostle maintains a clear distinction to the same effect. Thus v. 22: ‘He raised up David.’ v. 23: ‘Of this man’s **seed** God raised up Jesus.’ v. 30: ‘But God raised him *from the dead*.’ v. 33: ‘God has fulfilled his promise in that he raised up Jesus. And as for the fact that he raised him **FROM THE DEAD**, no more to return to corruption, he said...’ In the latter examples there seems an emphatic *contrast* between the natural production or official appointment and the resurrection *from the dead*. This is intimated in the particles at the beginning of v. 34, as well as in the other peculiarities of its structure. Had the allusion in this and the preceding verse been the same, the words ‘*from the dead*,’ if not inserted in each (vv. 33 and 34) would at least have occurred in the former, their omission in the latter not being of so great importance to the sense. The fact, however, is directly the reverse. **The legitimate conclusion, therefore, seems to be that the Apostle begins to speak of the resurrection in the 34th verse and not in v. 33.**

“There is yet one other consideration which I apprehend may be regarded as decisive against the alleged reference to the resurrection. It is that the divine promise here referred to is explained in v. 23 as fulfilled in raising up Jesus, not from the dead, but of **the seed of David**. ‘The promise made to the fathers,’ says Outrein, ‘God did not fulfill in the first place and principally by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, but by sending him in the flesh and by appointing him to the various functions required of him.’

“It may be added that the introduction of the doctrine of the resurrection renders the divine oracle under consideration less appropriate than it otherwise would be to the passages where it occurs. Such an allusion does not happily harmonize with the magnificence of the 2nd Psalm. It affords no proof of Jesus’ superiority to angels, but tends rather to a contrary conclusion...On the whole therefore it may fairly be doubted whether there exists any valid evidence in favor of the declarative sense of the passage before us. And hence we have no alternative but to explain it according to its **literal** acceptation, as an absolute affirmation of the divine Sonship of Christ. That this is the exposition which would most readily occur to the Jew, is too evident to require any detailed proof.”¹ [Treffry goes on to speak of an eternal day and an “emanitive production.” But he gets Acts 13:33 right!]

The time of the generation of the Son as the seed of David is clearly described in Matthew and Luke. The collapse of the word “today” into a meaningless eternity means abandoning the proper meaning of “today” and eliminates the Truth of Scripture.

¹ Treffry, *Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ*, London, 1849, pp. 281-285.