

VIRGIN BIRTH—ONLY BEGOTTEN

Much has been written about the “pre-existence” of Jesus. He did not exist before He existed, but did exist in eternity before He made His appearance on this earth. He as before all things as God and as the Word, and was involved in all creation. There is no proof that He was the “Son” of God prior to His earthly appearance, but from that time on He is recognized as God's Son—His “only begotten Son”. Before He became the Son, there had to be a begetting. Someone has written that Jesus was born, but not begotten. How could that be? Much is written about **how** Jesus became the Son of God. It is said that He was “born of a virgin”, though this is denied by many who fail to regard His divinity. The Savior was to come from “woman” (Gen. 3:15). He did so (Gal.4:4). He was born to Mary, who was the wife of Joseph. Some write about the virgin birth, but say very little about “the begotten Son of God”. Some accept the virgin birth as factual, but try to minimize the concept of His begetting—His being “the only begotten Son of God”.

Some maintain that Jesus was the Son of God in eternity before His earthly life. The director of the Open Forum at Freed-Hardeman University once stated that before He came to earth, “He chose to have the Holy Spirit as His Father” (Feb. 3, 2003), implying that deity took this manner of becoming man.¹ Another has written, “This unique relationship does not imply or entail that Jesus ever began to be the Son of God; rather, it suggests an eternal relationship. He was the Son of God before His enfleshment....And the baby's father was the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35). The begetting of the baby was the action of the Spirit, not the father.”² Others strongly deny this. Another writes, “Gabriel says Mary's child would be called the Son of God because he would be begotten by the Holy Spirit, so the Father must have called him his son for that reason.”³ Here is a reference to the function of the Holy Spirit in the begetting, but the **Father** (not the Spirit) **was** the “Father”. “He was the Son of God because being begotten in the womb of Mary by a miracle. The angel said he was to be called the Son of the Most High God.”⁴

Jesus was the “Word” of God (John 1:1-3), the “I Am” (John 8:58), and possibly as the “Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament ages, but **where** can we find that He had a subordinate role as a “Son” before coming to earth? We can best describe His earthly relationship through the term “the only begotten” (Gr. *monogenes*) of God the Father. Jesus was not the only son of Mary, for she later “knew” Joseph (Matt.1:25), and had other children by him (Matt. 13:55-56), but Jesus **was** the only “begotten” Son of **God**, for no other was ever conceived and born physically as was Jesus. Hence, He was the “only begotten” Son of God. There is a clear association of the terms “virgin birth” and “the only begotten”, as both relate to Jesus' deity and humanity. Some say it doesn't matter too much what we believe (and teach?) about either of these two terms, as long as we don't “deny” the deity of our Lord. Does this mean we must actually **say** “I deny the deity of Jesus” before we are guilty of such? Is not a failure to accept the teaching of the virgin birth as well as the teaching of the only begotten, in itself a denial? Some claim to accept Jesus as the only begotten, but try to explain it away or give it a new definition.

There has been a determined effort in the brotherhood (by a few, while the most remain silent) during the last 3 decades, to belittle the reality of this Sonship beginning at His birth, while emphasizing the Sonship as having been in eternity prior to coming to earth. Some in the “scholarly” arena contend that the term “only begotten” simply means “*unique*”, or “*one of a kind*”. It has even been said that

“beloved” might be closer to *monogenes* than “unique”. If that be true, just when did He become “beloved”? At His baptism, Jesus is called “beloved” (Matt. 3:17), and later at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:5). Would this be other times that Jesus was *monogenes*? The words *unique* and *beloved* are too broad in nature to describe the special relationship Jesus had with God. Elijah was unique in that he was the only man known to have been taken to heaven in a fiery chariot, but he was **not** “an only begotten son” of God. Was Jesus unique? Yes, in the sense that He was conceived of the Spirit, begotten by the Father, and born to a virgin. He was unique in other ways as well, but He was the “only begotten” in one way. He **became** “unique” because of his being begotten of the Father and born to a virgin. A favorite expression by many is that Jesus was “one of a kind”, or “the one and only” Son of God. It may depend on what is meant by the word “kind”. If we mean “human-kind”, then it is false, for He was like his brethren —in the flesh (Heb. 2:12-14). If we mean that He was special because of His begetting and birth, then why not just say so, and keep using the terms “only begotten” and “virgin birth” as declared in scripture?

It is not accurate to say that Jesus is the “one and only son” of God, for God had other sons. Adam is called the “son of God” (Luke 3:38). Angels were “sons of God” (Job 38:7). Job's children were “sons of God” (Job 1:6). **But**, none of these were “begotten” sons of God, **as** was Jesus. He was the “only” one of all God's sons, and was unique in this, but the word “unique” does not in itself tell us why, but the word “begotten” does.

We maintain that Jesus not only **is** the Son of God, but **“the only begotten Son of the Father”**. It is said by some that many translations of old do **not** use the word “begotten”. However, there are many of old that **do**. Almost two dozen of older versions use the word. Scholarship is divided over this, and when all their arguments about the Hebrew and Greek words are expounded upon, the issue is not settled. Some of the world's ripest scholars have included the word “begotten” in their work of the KJV, ASV, NASB, ABU, AMPL. and LIVING ORACLES. In the 20th century work of the RSV, the word “begotten” was dropped. Since that time, the Living Bible, NIV, CEV, NEB, Goodspeed and other free-thought versions have followed suit. They all use “only” or “the one and only”. Neither word or term is adequate to replace the word “begotten”

Perhaps here would be a good time to take a look at the words “beget”, “begot” and “begotten”. The **Oxford Dictionary** states that the word “beget” (when used literally) is typical of a man, sometimes of a man and woman, bringing a child into existence by the process of reproduction. The example is given, “they hoped that the king might beget an heir by his new queen”. It also can be used figuratively as, “killings beget more killings”. Synonyms given are *father, sire, engender, generate, spawn, create, give life to, bring into being, bring into the world, bare, procreate, reproduce, breed*. **Webster's Unabridged Dictionary** states that the words “begotten” and “begot” are alternative participles of the word “beget”. The first definition (literal) given is “to procreate, as a father, or sire, to generate, as to *beget* a son”. Then, the second definition (figurative) is “to produce, as an effect, to cause to exist, to generate, as *luxuries beget vice*” (Vol. II, p. 167, 168). **Vine's Expository Dictionary** states that *gennaō* (a basic part of *monogenes*) is used literally and “chiefly used of men 'begetting' children” (page 57). The word may sometimes be used of women bringing forth children, because the children are begotten by men.

The point is, that in the genealogies of the Bible, the word “begat” or “begot” refers to those who have been “begotten”, as is used many many times in both the old and new testament records. This is why the word must be considered with reference to

physical birth, and **not** simply to something or someone being “unique”. Read the genealogy of Jesus in Matt. 1:11-16. Each time the one “begotten” was from his father, and Joseph was begotten by his father, Jacob. But, when we get to Jesus, it only says that Jesus was “born” of Mary (not begotten by Joseph, for he was not Jesus' biological father). It was GOD Who begat Jesus by sending the Holy Spirit to cause Mary to conceive. So, in Jesus' own begetting, He is said to have been “begotten” of God—the Father.

In our next article, we shall note some of the arguments used by proponents of the “the only son” movement, and the efforts of some to make the word “begotten” apply to Jesus Himself in a figurative way. We shall examine the passages where Jesus is called the “begotten” Son of God, and the use of the term in other instances.

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Works Cited

1. Ralph Gilmore, *Freed-Hardeman Lectures Open Forum, 2003*
2. Roy Lanier Jr., *Epistles of John*, Quality Pub., Abilene, Tex. 1989
3. Roy Lanier Sr., *The Timeless Trinity*, Lanier Pub., Denver, Co. 1974
4. Ibid.