Why Christ is called the Son of God

A biblical exposition

by

Terry Hill

CHRIST - THE REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:9-10

*Please note: Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quoted in this study is from the KJV

First published 1st May 2022
Last edited 18th November 2022

Email: terry_sda@blueyonder.co.uk

Website: https://www.theprophetstillspeaks.co.uk

Index

Why Christ is called the Son of God

An introduction to the problem

Some say that the only reason why Christ is called the Son of God is because of the events of Bethlehem - meaning the incarnation. Others say it is only because of His resurrection from the dead. There are also those who say that this designation is only a metaphor to depict the love between Christ and the Father (also said to be a metaphor). Others say that Jesus is only role-playing the part of a son (just like 'the Father' is only role-playing the part of a father). Another view is that Christ possesses this title only because He is the promised Messiah. On the other hand, there are those who disagree with all of these reasons. They say that the reason why Christ is called the Son of God is because before anything was created, He was begotten (brought forth) of God, and is therefore truly (really) God's Son.

Who though, is correct – and what evidence is there, in the Scriptures, so that we may determine what is true? In this article, this is the question we shall consider. As I am sure you will agree, any conclusions we draw must be based upon the weight of evidence we find in the Scriptures.

Synopsis

As this article will reveal, it would be quite unreasonable, from a study of the Bible, to conclude that Christ is called the Son of God only because of His incarnation – or for that matter, only because of His resurrection from the dead. It will also be seen that it would be just as unreasonable to say that this terminology is only a metaphor, or that Christ is only role-playing the part of a son, or that He only has this title because He is the Messiah. This article will also reveal that it is even more unreasonable to say, as some do, that if Christ is said to be begotten (brought forth) of God, then it must be concluded that He is a created being such as are the angels. We shall now consider, from the Bible, the evidence for these conclusions.

John's gospel - a systematic theology

John's gospel was the first systematic theology to deal with Christ's 'Sonship'. Although written by John, it is not a human theology. It is a divine theology. It was God Himself, through the Holy Spirit, who led John to write as he did.

John's gospel is very different to the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. It contains no parables. It also omits a great many of the 'life events' of Christ that are found in these other three gospels. This is

because it has a specific intent. It is to show that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30-31). This is why, in our quest to understand why Christ is called the Son of God, it needs to be given special attention.

As each section of John’s gospel is read, it would be profitable to keep reminding ourselves; “God led John to write this to show that Christ is the Son of God”, “God led John to write this to show that Christ is the Son of God”. When John’s gospel is read this way, it will take on a much deeper meaning. Everything that God led John to write is to show that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. This is why, if we take John’s gospel overall, we shall better understand why Christ has this designation. It is God’s way of revealing this to us. John’s gospel is much more than a biography of Christ’s life on earth. It is a theology – a divine theology.

More than just an earthly son

As already noted, some say that the only reason why Jesus is called the Son of God is because of His birth at Bethlehem (the incarnation) but if this were true, John’s gospel wouldn’t make sense. First of all, John doesn’t mention anything about the events surrounding Christ’s earthly birth (e. g. the visitation of angels to Joseph and Mary, the miraculous conception of a baby in Mary’s womb, the virgin birth, the visit of the shepherds and the magi, also Simeon’s blessing of Jesus in the temple etc), nor does he mention anything of Christ’s child-life. If Christ is called the Son of God only because of the incarnation, then why didn’t God lead John to write about these things? John’s record of Christ’s earthly life only begins at His baptism (John 1:29-34).

Secondly, as we shall soon discover, John’s gospel portrays Christ as the Son of God *before* His incarnation – not because of it. This leads to the conclusion that when John said that the purpose of his gospel was to show “that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:30-31), he could not have meant that Christ has this title only because of the incarnation. There must have been more to it – much more.

John’s opening words

It should not be surprising that the opening words of John’s gospel would reflect the intent of him writing it.

> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” John 1:1-3

In order to lead the readers of John's gospel to believe that Christ is the Son of God (John 20:30-31), the very first thing that the Holy Spirit led John to write is that the Word, who eventually became flesh (John 1:14), had pre-existed with God (John 1:1-2). John also wrote that the Word was God (John 1:1). This reveals Christ's divinity. John also made it clear that by the same Word, all things were made that have been made (John 1:3). This shows that before anything was created, the Word (Christ) already existed. We shall return to that particular thought later.

The more that John's gospel is read, the more it will be realised that its opening words strongly imply that Christ *pre-existed* as the divine Son of God. This is because John doesn't say anything that would even suggest that Jesus, during His life on earth, did something that would lead Him to *become* the Son of God – and that includes His resurrection from the dead. On the basis of this therefore, it is only reasonable to conclude that Christ, even in His pre-existence, was the Son of God.

In these opening words, John accents on Christ's deity. He certainly does not describe Christ's Sonship with God as a position (a status) to which He attained on earth. At the very best, it should only be believed that Christ, at His incarnation, became the Son of God in a new sense.

Some have understandably enquired: What is the "beginning" that John speaks of in these opening verses? The honest answer is that we have not been told, at least not specifically, but certainly it cannot be the beginning of God. This is because with God, there is no beginning. It is quite possible though that John was using this expression to mean that this was the beginning of God's revelation of Himself. After all, it is a fact that by using the Bible, we cannot 'go back' any further than when God and Christ existed together, or, to put it another way; the most remote (distant) point we come to in the Scriptures, is where God says He brought forth a son (Proverbs 8:22-31, Psalm 2:7). This is the beginning of the revelation of God.

There is nothing in Scripture to explain how Christ was begotten (brought forth) of God, neither is there anything to explain how God has eternally existed. There is nothing either to show how God and Christ have their existence together. This is where we must leave it. Any attempt to explain these things would be sheer speculation. We are not to speculate about the things that God, in His divine wisdom, has chosen not to reveal. We are to study those things that He has revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29). This is enough for our salvation.

Having said that, it is only common sense to say that a person cannot be the same person as he is with. In other words, two persons cannot be the same person. It must be concluded therefore that God, and the Word, although both are said to be God (John 1:1), are two distinct personages. As John made clear in the prologue of his gospel, only one of these divine persons, the Word, was made flesh (John 1:14). God and Christ therefore, must be two distinct persons (two personalities). There are no other viable options.

Two Gods?

It is often argued that Christ is not begotten (brought forth) of God, but if this were true, would it not mean that we have two Gods? Reason with me.

If it is said that the Word (this is the person whom John sets out to show is the divine Son of God) was not begotten of God, then because God and the Word are two distinct persons, also because they are both described as God, could it not be reasoned that they are two separate Gods?

Putting this another way: If one divine person is said not to have been begotten (brought forth) of the other, would it not be reasonable to conclude that each, in His own right, is a God? This, to many people, is the inevitable conclusion of denying that Christ is begotten of God. To them it is like saying there are two persons, both of whom are Gods. As it is, the Bible says that Christ is the Son *of* God, not a God.

So what else, in his gospel, did John write to show that Christ is the divine Son of God?

John's further evidence

As John's gospel is read, it will be seen that in order to show Christ to be the Son of God (John 20:30-31), John cites, from Christ's life on earth, certain events that reveal His divinity. These bear witness to John's opening words - that the Word was God (John 1:1).

These events include, but are far from being limited to: John the Baptist saying that Jesus is the Son of God (chapter 1), Jesus changing the water into wine (chapter 2), Christ's talk with Nicodemus where we are told that God sent His Son into the world (chapter 3), John the Baptist again referring to Christ as the Son of God (chapter 3), Christ's talk with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well when He claimed to be the Messiah (chapter 4), the healing of the nobleman's son (chapter 4) also Christ's discussions with the Jews about His Sonship with God when claiming that God was His father (chapter 5).

There is also the healing on the Sabbath of a man who could not walk that had an infirmity for 38 years (chapter 5), the feeding of the multitude with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fishes (chapter 6), the claim of Jesus to be from Heaven where He was before (chapter 6), Jesus walking on the water (chapter 6), the confession of the disciples who said they believed He was “the Son of the living God” (Chapter 6), Christ’s claim that His Father had sent him (chapter 7), also His identification with the “I am” who had revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush (chapter 8). John also included in his gospel, the healing of the blind man when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (chapter 9), more discussions with the Jews when He again claimed to be the Son of God (chapter 10), also the raising of Lazarus after he had been dead for four days - which Jesus said would ultimately lead to the glorification of the Son of God (chapter 11). John recorded all of these things, and much more, as the evidence (the signs) of Christ’s divine Sonship to God.

We must also take into consideration the accusations that the Jews levelled at Christ. John faithfully recorded these accusations. They are an integral part of the evidence he provides to show that Christ is the divine Son of God.

The main accusation of the Jews concerning Christ was His ongoing claim to be the Son of God. They regarded it as deserving of death (John 19:7). They reasoned He was making Himself God. This is why they accused Him of blasphemy (John 10:30-36). They knew that claiming to be the Son of God was the same as claiming to be divine.

The same happened when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath day. The Jews said that He was not only breaking the Sabbath but also, because He claimed God as His father, was making Himself equal with God (John 5:17-18). Needless to say, they understood Jesus as claiming God as His father in the very highest sense. Jesus never said they were wrong in this belief. Never did He seek to correct them.

The Jews knew exactly what Jesus meant by His claim to be the Son of God. It had nothing to do with His incarnation. It had everything to do with His pre-existence.

John recorded that Jesus, on a number of occasions, actually called Himself the Son of God (John 5:25-26, 9:35-37, 10:36, 11:4). This is in addition to the numerous times that John recorded Him as referring to God as His father, also to Himself as God’s son. Never though did Jesus point to a future event such as His resurrection from the dead as justification for calling Himself the Son of God.

Jesus always spoke of His Sonship to God in an *ongoing present tense* - not in the sense that at sometime in the future He would become the Son of God. As has been said already, there is nothing in John's gospel, nor in any of the other gospels, that would even suggest such a thing.

Jesus continually spoke of God as His father, also of Himself as God's son. The words "my father" were often on His lips. In John's gospel alone, He is recorded as using this expression 38 times (KJV).

Throughout John's gospel, it is continually emphasised that God is the father of Christ; also that Christ is the Son of God. This is hardly surprising - seeing that John said he had written his gospel to show that Christ is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

John refers to Christ as God's Son more times than any other Bible writer. In fact in his little letter (epistle) known as 1 John, he refers to Jesus as God's Son 23 times (KJV). That alone should be telling us something.

Only-begotten (Gr. Monogenes)

We now need to take into consideration where it says in John's gospel that Christ is the "only begotten" of God.

In John's writings, the terminology "only begotten" is found 5 times (John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18 and 1 John 4:9 KJV). Each time, John applies it to Christ. This expression is translated from the Greek word 'monogenes' (μονογενής), which, generally, when applied to persons, conveys the idea of an only-born child of his or her parents. Luke, in his gospel, used it this way three times. In the KJV it is translated as "only" (son), "one only" (daughter), and "only child" (see Luke 7:12, 8:42, 9:38). In every translation I have read, these verses have been translated in the very same way. Each version describes the individual concerned as someone without siblings (an only-born).

In the Septuagint, which is a 2nd/3rd BC Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures (Brenton translation), 'monogenes' is twice translated "only child" (Judges 11:34 and Psalms 25:16). It is also translated "only-begotten one" (life) (Psalm 22:20). In the Apocrypha, it is used to denote an "only daughter" (Tobit 3:15), also to say that two children of different parents were both "the only begotten children of their fathers" (Tobit 8:17).

In extra-biblical literature, before the New Testament was written, there is also clear evidence of 'monogenes' being used to mean an only-born of his or her parents (a son or daughter without siblings).

Herodotus (4th century BC), in his legendary work *Histories,* twice used 'monogenes' when writing of an "only son" (Book 2 §79 and Book 7 §221). Hesiod (c. 8th century BC), in his poem "*Theogony*", also used it twice. Both occasions were to describe an "only child" (*Theogony 426 and 448-449*). In another poem, namely *Works and Days,* Hesiod used it to describe an "only boy-child" (*Works and Days* 376–378).

Plato (c. 428 BC – c. 348 BC), who is regarded by many as one of the world's greatest philosophers, also used, in his writings, the word 'monogenes'. In his dialogue *Critias*, he describes Cleito as the "only daughter" of Evenor and Leucippe (*Critias,* 113c–d). He also uses it twice in his dialogue *Timaeus*. This was to describe the "one only begotten heaven" (*Timaeus* 92c) and the "one only-begotten and created heaven" (*Timaeus,* 31b).

In these latter two instances, we can see how 'monogenes' can be used other than describing sons and daughters – although it still means 'one only begotten'. This is a reminder that words, depending upon the way they are used, can take on various meanings, also have different usages. A word does not necessarily mean exactly the same each time it is used. This is why, very often, what an author means by the use of a word can only be determined by the context in which the author uses it. Context therefore, in determining the meaning of an author's use of a word, is very often crucial. In fact it determines how any given word *must* be understood.

Take for example Hebrews 11:17. This is where Paul cites, as an outstanding act of faith in God, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. Paul knew that Isaac was not Abraham's only son, yet he describes him as "only begotten [monogenes]". So why did Paul describe him this way? It was because this is the way that God described Isaac when this event actually took place (see Genesis 22:2, 12 and 16). Paul was simply echoing God's description of Isaac.

God described Isaac as Abraham's "only". The phrase "thine only", as used in the above verses in Genesis, is translated from the Hebrew *yāḥîḏ,* generally meaning "only" or "one" or "only one" or "solitary". Notice in these verses that the second instance of the word "son" is a supplied word, meaning it is not in the original text. It is the same in Hebrews 11:17. Again the word "son" is a supplied word. Neither God nor Paul was describing Isaac as Abraham's only biological son. Paul regarded 'monogenes' as an able equivalent to describe Isaac in the very same way that God described him in Genesis 22. Neither of the contexts, Genesis nor Hebrews, was speaking of Isaac as an only biological son. The above shows that context is crucial.

Fortunately, an understanding of why Christ is called the Son of God does not depend solely upon the correct translation of a single Greek word. We have the entire Scriptures (the weight of evidence) to determine it. As it is though, John does use, with reference to Christ, the word 'monogenes' – and the context is as a son. This much is indisputable (see John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18 and 1 John 4:9), – and remember, John's purpose in writing his gospel was to show that Christ is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

Some argue that 'monogenes' does not contain the concept of 'only begotten'. They say it only means 'unique' or 'one of a kind'. What these people often fail to realise though (apart from their ignorance of its historical usage), is that the real issue is not with 'monogenes' but with the word 'son'. This is because whatever they determine 'monogenes' to mean, whether it is 'unique' or 'one of a kind', the Bible will still say that Christ is a son. This is the crucial issue.

The all-important question therefore is not simply what is conveyed by the word 'monogenes', but what does it mean for Christ to be called a 'son'? This is the question that all who reject 'monogenes' as meaning 'only begotten' appear to overlook - yet it is a question that demands an answer. When this answer is realised, it will then be known why He is called the Son *of* God.

Needless to say, those who say that 'monogenes' only means 'unique' or one of a kind', without the concept of only begotten, do not believe that Christ is a real (natural) son. They say instead that the words, 'the Son of God', are only a title (a name) or a metaphor (a symbol), either that or they say He is only role-playing the part of a son.

One more point to consider. If the word 'monogenes' only means 'unique' or 'one of a kind', and does not include the concept of 'only begotten', then how would we know that the widow's son (Luke 7:12), also the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:42), and the man possessed with an unclean spirit (Luke 9:38), were all without siblings? The answer is; we would not know. This is because the *only reason* why these people are said to be the only-born of their parents, is on the understanding that 'monogenes' means 'only-begotten'. So if 'monogenes' only means 'unique' or 'one of a kind', without the concept of 'only-begotten', we would not know *why* these three persons were 'unique' or 'one of a kind'. This is because no explanation is available. Certainly we would have no way of knowing they were without brothers or sisters. They could have been 'unique' or 'one of a kind' for any number of reasons. Why conclude it was because they were without siblings?

If these three people are not portrayed as the 'only-born' of their parents (a child without siblings), then the anguish (suffering) of a parent, as is usually emphasised in these stories, is completely lost. This would also apply to God. If Christ is not His only begotten Son, then God did not suffer the anguish of someone who sacrificed His only begotten Son. Surely this is a denial of the gospel (John 3:16-18, 1 John 4:9-10).

A son only from the resurrection?

Some say that Christ is only called the Son of God because of His resurrection from the dead, but this makes no more sense than saying He is only called this because of His incarnation. Allow me to explain.

John recorded that Nathanael, at the beginning of Christ's ministry, also Martha, near the end of it, called Jesus the Son of God (John 1:49, 11:27). In fact throughout Christ's ministry, His disciples were doing the same (Matthew 14:33, 16:16, John 6:69). Would they have all been referring to Him as such because of His future resurrection from the dead? I would not think so. None of Christ's followers appeared to grasp the fact that He would even die, let alone be resurrected – and this was after being with Him for over 3 years (Luke 18:31-34). We need to remember that Jesus never said to anyone that they were wrong in calling Him the Son of God.

It is possible that some who were calling Jesus the Son of God were present at His baptism. This was when God declared Jesus to be His "beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17). Perhaps some had heard about this from others, or had heard John the Baptist declare Jesus to be the Son of God (John 1:34, 3:35-36). All of this was in keeping with where the angel Gabriel had told Mary that the child she would bear would be called the Son of God – the Son of the Highest (Luke 1:30-35).

We know that Jesus Himself claimed to be the Son of God – also that this was becoming very well known. We know too that the Jews despised His claim. They said that because of it, He deserved to die (John 19:7). As time progressed, more and more people were becoming aware of Christ's claim to be the Son of God.

Take for example the Roman centurion, also those who were with him as they looked upon Jesus hanging on the cross. They said they believed Him to be the Son of God (Matthew 27:54, Mark 15:39). Did they refer to Jesus as such because they knew that He was going to be resurrected? If not, then why did they say it? They were obviously convicted that He was the Son of God. Why use this terminology – and what did they mean by it?

When God's voice was heard at Christ's baptism saying that Jesus was His "beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22), how could those who heard these words have reasoned that God was referring to Christ's future resurrection from the dead? That would have been impossible. They would not have even known He was going to die let alone be resurrected. What therefore, would they have understood God as saying – except that Jesus really is His "beloved Son"? In fact, what reason would they have had to believe otherwise?

Another example is that of the unclean spirits. Recall when Jesus cast some of them into a drove of pigs. These spirits referred to Jesus as the "Son of God" (Matthew 8:29), also as the "Son of the most high God" (Mark 5:7, Luke 8:28). Are we to believe that they referred to Him as such because they knew He was going to die and then be resurrected?

Mark, who began his gospel by saying that Christ is the Son of God (Mark 1:1), pointed out that because unclean spirits were prostrating themselves before Jesus, also calling Him "the Son of God", they were told by Jesus not to make Him known (Mark 1:24, 1:34, 3:11-12). These unclean spirits knew Christ's true identity. Christ was their creator. They knew Him in His pre-existence.

Luke recorded the same. He said that Jesus commanded devils who were calling Him the Son of God to cease from speaking. He further explained that these devils knew that Jesus was the Christ (Luke 4:41)

Twice Satan said to Jesus "if thou be the Son of God" (Matthew 4:3-6). Did this mighty fallen angel believe that Christ was called by this name because He was going to die and be resurrected? Satan was attempting to have Christ doubt His divine Sonship to God. Satan also knew Christ in His pre-existence.

The Jews said that the reason why Christ deserved to die was because He called Himself the Son of God (John 19:7). Did they believe He had this title by reason of His future resurrection from the dead? Obviously not! They said that by making this claim, He was making Himself God. This is why they said He was committing blasphemy. We have the record of John on that one (John 5:17-18 and 10:30-36).

These Jews did not regard this terminology, the Son of God, as being because of the incarnation or the resurrection. They knew exactly what it meant. They knew Jesus was claiming to be divine.

When Jesus was dying, the Jews mocked Him by saying that if He was the Son of God He should come down off the cross (Matthew 27:39-43). They obviously did not take this designation to mean He would die and be resurrected. They were probably amongst those who believed that the promised Messiah would never die (John 12:34). This is more than likely why they said that if He really was who He was claiming to be, He should come down off the cross.

Caiaphas ordered Jesus to say clearly whether or not He was the Son of God (Matthew 26:63). Why did he refer to Jesus as such? Again there must have been a reason. Jesus replied by confirming He was indeed the Son of God (Matthew 26:63-65, Mark 14:61-63, Luke 22:70-71).

Whose Son is He?

When Christ's ministry was drawing to a close, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, attempted to trick (tempt) Him into incriminating Himself. This they did by asking Him questions (Matthew 22:15-36). In reply to their questioning, Jesus asked "… What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42). They replied saying "…The son of David" (Matthew 22:42). The Jews recognised this as a title of the coming Christ (Mark 12:35-37). Jesus then asked them another question. It was one that brought them to silence. He asked (quoting Psalm 110:1)

> "…How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" Matthew 22:43-45

In the New Testament, Psalm 110:1 is amongst the most referred to of all Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus regarded this Psalm as referring to Himself. The Hebrew has *Yᵉhōvâ* speaking to *'ā̱ḏôn*. There was no argument from the Jews that David was referring to the Messiah as Lord (*'ā̱ḏôn*). This can also be seen from Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:34-38). The writer of Hebrews also refers to Psalm 110:1 as speaking of Christ (Hebrews 1:13). By quoting Psalm 45:6-7, he also has God speaking of His Son as God (Hebrews 1:8).

So returning to the question that Jesus asked ("If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?"), the Pharisees were faced with a dilemma. They believed that the promised Messiah would be of the seed of David (who had been dead for 1000 years) so how, Jesus asked, could David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, call him Lord? Who was David's Lord? This was a reference to the pre-existence and the divinity of the Messiah.

Christ's claim to be the Son of God was a continuing stumbling block to many of the Jews (John 5:16-18, 10:32-36). This is why they said He deserved to die (John 19:7). Jesus not only claimed pre-existence, but also Identified Himself with the "I AM" (John 8:56-58).

A divine revelation

Matthew recorded that Jesus, when retiring one day to the region of Caesarea Philippi, asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" The disciples said that some were saying He was John the Baptist, also that others were saying He was Elijah or one of the other prophets (Matthew 16:13-14). Jesus responded by asking

> "….But whom say ye that I am?" Matthew 16:15

This is the all-important question. It is not who do others say Jesus is, but *whom do you* say Jesus is? Peter replied

> "…. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16

Notice that Peter did not say that Christ was the Son of God, but that He was "the Son of the *living* God". God was here revealing to Peter, also to the other disciples, the divinity of Christ. Jesus responded to Peter's confession by saying

> "…Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Matthew 16:17

Peter's confession, according to Jesus, was *a direct revelation* from God. It was neither Peter's own devising, nor that of anyone else who was human. Jesus though, made no mention of His Sonship to God as being only because of His future death and resurrection. If this were what God had meant to convey to Peter, then surely Jesus would have explained this to him. As it is, He didn't.

It can only be reasoned therefore that without any such explanation, Peter would have taken this Sonship to be literal (which both God and Jesus must have realised he would do). As no such explanation was given, what reason would this disciple, or any of the other disciples who were with him that day, have had for not taking this revelation from God literally? None as far as I can see! In fact they all heard Jesus say that He would build His church upon the belief that He, Jesus, was "the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:18). That should be telling us everything. Jesus did not build His church upon a metaphor but upon something that was real.

Only a matter of days later, on the mount of transfiguration, Peter would actually hear God saying that Christ was His "beloved Son" (Matthew 17:5, Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35). This would have been confirmation to Peter of what Jesus had said to him was revelation from God (Matthew 16:17). That Christ is the Son of God is a revelation from God. This is the confession of those in whom God dwells, and who overcome the world (1 John 4:15, 5:5).

Important to remember

It is important to remember that all those who were calling Christ the Son of God were doing so decades *before any of the New Testament was written*. They only had in their possession what we today call the Old Testament Scriptures. They therefore, were not using this terminology because of what would later be written about Him by the New Testament writers. All those who were calling Jesus the Son of God, must have had another reason for doing so.

Monogenes - a disambiguation

As we have seen, John the gospel writer was led by the Holy Spirit to present Christ's divinity as proof of His Sonship to God. Certainly Jesus did not become the Son of God because of what He attained on earth. This alone shows that Christ must have been a Son prior to coming to earth. This leaves one question. How does someone become a son of God?

The Bible says that sons of God shouted with joy at the creation of this world (Job 38:7). These are usually thought to be angels (see Septuagint, Brenton translation). Like Adam, who is also called the son of God (Luke 3:38), angels are created. The Bible also says that forgiven sinners are sons of God. This is by adoption (John 1:12, Romans 8:14-15, Galatians 4:5, Ephesians 1:5 and 1 John 3:1-2). Christ though is not said to be a created son like an angel, neither is He said to be an adopted son like the forgiven sinner. He is a Son because He is *begotten* of God – begotten in the express image of God's person (John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, Hebrews 1:3, 1 John 4:9).

By describing Christ as the 'monogenes' Son of God, John distinguishes Him from other sons of God. In other words, John qualified what he meant by 'Son'. The word 'monogenes' therefore is a disambiguation. It shows that Christ is the only begotten (the only brought forth) of God – not a created or an adopted son.

John's intention of using 'monogenes' would have been to avoid confusion. Simply saying that Christ is the Son of God, without any clarification, would have been ambiguous (open to interpretation).

When John wrote his gospel (generally thought to be late 1st century), Paul's writings, saying that forgiven sinners were called sons of God, were in circulation amongst Christians. By using 'monogenes', John made it absolutely clear what he meant when he said he had written his gospel to show that Christ is the Son of God. He meant that Christ really is the *only begotten* (monogenes) Son of God.

Begotten before all things

So when and where did this begetting (bringing forth) of Christ actually take place? This is the all-important question.

Well it certainly didn't happen at the incarnation. We know this because God, in order to show that Jesus is the Son of God (which is the entire purpose of John's gospel), led John to cite Christ's divinity as the proof of it – not His birth at Bethlehem.

As the gospels are read, it can be seen that a title Jesus often used for Himself was the "Son of man". Needless to say, this *was* with respect to His earthly birth. It should be reasonably evident that Christ, prior to His incarnation, was not the "Son of man" (son of humanity).

There is no record of anyone, during Christ's ministry, calling Him the Son of man (KJV), although, as we have seen, they did call Him the Son of God. John said he had written his gospel to show that Christ is the Son of God (John 20:30-31). He did not say he had written his gospel to show that Christ was the Son of man. This is one of the reasons why we know that when John said 'the Son of God', he was not referring to Christ becoming incarnate. If that had been the case, then he would have said he had written his gospel to show that Christ was the Son of man.

We know too, as we have seen from above, that Christ was the Son of God prior to His death and resurrection. So when was Christ begotten?

This begetting (bringing forth) of Christ from God could only have taken place before anything was created. This is because it was through (by) Christ that God created *all* things (John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:1-2). Christ therefore, must have been begotten (brought forth) of God *before all things*.

Here now is an extremely important question. Does this begetting of Christ mean that He is a created being as are the angels? Certainly not! Reason with me.

When Christ was begotten, nothing existed except for God. This means there was nothing external to God. This is because God, as yet, had not created anything. This bringing forth of a Son therefore was an internal function (action) of God. Remember; God created all things by Christ. Christ therefore, had to be begotten (brought forth of God) before anything was created. As the Scriptures say of Christ

> "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." Proverbs 8:22-31

This also means that because nothing other than God existed when Christ was begotten, He had to literally come out of (be born of/be begotten of/be brought forth of) God's own substance (God's very being). No other conclusion can be drawn. Christ had to be brought forth (be begotten) of God because nothing existed except for God.

Just as Christ, because He was born (brought forth) of Mary, is truly the Son of man, so too, because He is begotten (brought forth) of God, He is truly the Son of God.

Exactly when this took place cannot be determined. What we do know is that the prophet Micah said that the coming Messiah would be "from everlasting" (Micah 5:2 KJV). This expression is based upon the Hebrew word *ʿôlām*, which is said to depict time out of mind - a point (past or future) that cannot be fixed (determined).

The word *ʿôlām* has been likened to standing upon the seashore, looking towards the horizon, and realising there is more beyond without actually seeing it (it is hidden from view). We know too that if we travel towards the horizon, we will never reach it; neither will we ever see beyond it. There will always be more beyond. This aptly

depicts when Christ was begotten. It is so far back in eternity that it cannot even be imagined, let alone be determined. This is why various versions of the Bible translate Micah 5:2 as saying of the Messiah

> "… whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." NIV
>
> "… from old, from the days of eternity." Greens Literal Translation
>
> "… from long ago, From the days of eternity." NAS
>
> "… from the beginning, from the days of eternity." Douay-Rheims
>
> "… whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." RSV
>
> "… whose origins go back to the distant past." NJB
>
> "… whose roots are far back in the past, in days gone by" (NEB)
>
> "… his comings forth [are] of old, From the days of antiquity (YLT)

No matter how far we "go back", it cannot be determined when Christ was begotten. It is essentially all eternity. All that we know for sure is that He is begotten – and that because of this, He is truly God's Son. This is where we must leave it. The rest is known to God alone.

The *only* begotten of God

Not only does the Bible tell us that Christ is begotten of God, but it also says He is the *only* begotten of God (John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18 and 1 John 4:9 KJV). No one else has ever been begotten of God. Even an angel cannot be said to be a son in this respect.

Just as the material things of our world were made out of nothing, so too the angels were made out of nothing (out of things that do not appear – see Hebrews 11:3). This though, cannot be said of Christ. He was begotten (brought forth) of God's very own substance. He therefore, in His very nature, is truly and fully divine. That much is indisputable. He is not the Father but in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 1:19, 2:9). All things, including the angels, were created through (by) Christ. Christ, in His pre-existence, was not part of God's creation. He is of the Godhead.

We are told in the opening verses of the Book of Hebrews that Christ is the "express image" of His Father's person (Hebrews 1:1-3). As the writer of Hebrews further explained:

> "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Hebrews 1:4

Christ would have received this "inheritance" when He was begotten (brought forth) of God. Paul wrote that the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell in Christ (Colossians 1:19, 2:9). This was Christ's inheritance as the Son of God. The writer of Hebrews continues (quoting Psalm 2:7)

> "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" Hebrew 1:5

The answer is none of them. God never said to any of the angels "this day have I begotten thee". He only said this to Christ – His Son. We need to remember that Christ was God's Son throughout eternity. He did not become God's Son at His incarnation or at His resurrection. The passage continues

> "And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Hebrew 1:6

Christ had to be begotten before He came into the world, else it could not be said that God brought "the firstbegotten ***into*** the world". John the gospel writer said exactly the same.

> "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." 1 John 4:9

Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God sent Christ into the world to become the Son of God. Christ was brought into this world through the virgin birth at Bethlehem – but He was begotten of God before all things. Christ had to be begotten of God prior to His birth through Mary, else it could not be said that "God ***sent*** his only begotten Son ***into*** the world".

The gospel to the world

The gospel message is that God has given His only begotten Son as a sacrifice to pay the penalty of sin (John 3:16, 1 John 4:9). This is the message that God ordained should go to the world. This can clearly be seen in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip had explained to this eunuch the prophecy of Isaiah Chapter 53. This is where it prophesised the coming of the Messiah. Philip explained that this was speaking of Jesus. After this, the eunuch asked Philip what was stopping him from being baptised (Acts 8:36), Philip replied

> "… If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." Acts 8:37

The eunuch responded

"….I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Acts 8:37

On the basis of the eunuch's confession, Philip baptised him (Acts 8:38). Philip had led him to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Luke recorded that the apostle Paul, after his blindness had left him, spent some days in Damascus. He then said of this apostle

> "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." Acts 9:20

In keeping with this, Paul himself wrote to the believers in Rome

> "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" Romans 8:3

> "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32

Again we are told that God *sent* His Son into the world – showing that Jesus was previously a son. As the apostle said, God loves this world so much that He *gave* His **"own Son"** as a sacrifice for sin so that all who believed in Him could receive eternal life (John 3:16, 1 John 4:9).

This is the converting power of the gospel. It was foreshadowed by God's instruction to Abraham that he should sacrifice *his own son* Isaac. At Calvary though, no angel was there to stay the 'slayers knife', neither was there 'a ram caught in the thicket', but God had indeed provided the sacrifice. He had sacrificed His only begotten Son.

God's personal witness

We need to bear in mind God's personal witness of Christ. On the banks of the river Jordan, God's voice was heard saying

> "…This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17 (see also Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22)

What were those who heard God's voice to understand by His words? Could they have understood them as anything but God saying He had a Son? What did God intend for them to believe? Was it not that He had a Son? What would we have believed if we had been there?

God's voice was also heard on the mount of transfiguration

> "…This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Matthew 17:5 (see also Mark 9:7 and Luke 9:35)

Personally recalling this event, Peter wrote

> "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 2 Peter 1:16-17

Peter says that when the voice of God was heard saying, "this is my beloved Son", Christ received "honour and glory". He also says that as followers of Christ, they had "not followed cunningly devised fables". This would also have been confirmation to Peter as to what Jesus had told him just days earlier – that his confession of Christ being the Son of God was divine revelation (Matthew 16:16-17).

The gospel writer John was on the mount with Peter. He would also have heard God saying that Christ is His "beloved Son". John would also have been there the day that Jesus had confirmed this to Peter (Matthew 16:16-17). We can now understand John's emphasis on Christ being the Son of God. He had heard it from God's own voice, also from the lips of Jesus. We are also told in Scripture

> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." John 3:16-17

> "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:10

> "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." 1 John 5:9-10

The question is: Do we believe "the record"? Do we have "the witness of God" within ourselves – or are we calling God "a liar"?

If God did not really have a Son, then it should be reasonably obvious that He did not have a Son to give or to send. This of course, of itself, would make a mockery of the Word of God (the Scriptures) – and of the gospel. We should be taking God at His word. If He says He has a Son, then we should believe Him.

Conclusion

From this study of the Scriptures, we have seen that the overwhelming weight of evidence is that God really does have a Son. To say He does not have a Son is to deny that weight of evidence. It is also a denial of the gospel.

It is also saying that both God and Christ are not telling the truth. After all, as we have seen, God did testify (witness) that Christ is His Son, and Christ did testify (witness) that He is the Son of God (Matthew 3:17, 16:13-17, 17:5, Mark 14:62, John 5:25-26, 9:35-37, 10:36 and 11:4). This is the testimony of two witnesses, neither of whom would lie (Numbers 23:19, Titus 1:9). We need to think seriously about these things. We need to believe the testimony of both God and His Son. Is there a reason why we should not believe it?

I hope in some way that what I have written in this article has helped you to understand why Christ is called the Son of God. If you believe I am in error on any of these points, please let me know. I would be very interested to hear what you have to say.

Listed below, as an appendix, are texts of Scripture, other than found in the four gospels, which describe Jesus as the Son of God. Most of these were not used in the above study. It would have been too much to include all of them. As you read them, notice again the importance, also the emphasis, that John places upon believing Christ to be the Son of God.

God bless you as you seek the truth as it is in Jesus.

Terry Hill

Appendix

Acts 3:13
The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, **hath glorified his Son Jesus**; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.

Acts 3:26
Unto you first God, **having raised up his Son Jesus**, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities

Acts 8:37
And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is **the Son of God**.

Acts 9:20
And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, **that he is the Son of God**.

Acts 13:33
God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, **Thou art my Son**, this day have I begotten thee.

Romans 1:3
Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;

Romans 1:4
And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

Romans 1:9
For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in **the gospel of his Son**, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

Romans 5:10
For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by **the death of his Son**, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Romans 8:3
For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, **God sending his own Son** in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

Romans 8:29
For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to **the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren

Romans 8:32
He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

1 Corinthians 1:9
God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto **the fellowship of his Son** Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:28
And when all things shall be subdued unto him, **then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him** that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

2 Corinthians 1:19
For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.

Galatians 1:16
To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Galatians 2:20
I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by the faith of the Son of God**, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Galatians 4:4
But when the fulness of the time was come, **God sent forth his Son**, made of a woman, made under the law,

Galatians 4:6
And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth **the Spirit of his Son** into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Colossians 1:13
Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into **the kingdom of his dear Son**:

Ephesians 4:13
Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of **the knowledge of the Son of God**, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

1 Thessalonians 1:10
And to wait for **his Son** from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Hebrews 1:2
Hath in these last days **spoken unto us by his Son**, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

Hebrews 1:5
For unto which of the angels said he at any time, **Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?** And again, I will be to him a Father, **and he shall be to me a Son**?

Hebrews 1:8
But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Hebrews 4:14
Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, **Jesus the Son of God**, let us hold fast our profession.

Hebrews 5:5
So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, **Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.**

Hebrews 5:8
Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

Hebrews 6:6
If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves **the Son of God** afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Hebrews 7:3
Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto **the Son of God**; abideth a priest continually.

Hebrews 7:28
For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh **the Son**, who is consecrated for evermore.

Hebrews 10:29
Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot **the Son of God**, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

2 Peter 1:17
For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, **This is my beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased.

1 John 1:3
That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with **his Son** Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:7
But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ **his Son** cleanseth us from all sin.

1 John 2:22
Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? **He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son**.

1 John 2:23
Whosoever denieth **the Son**, the same hath not the Father: he that acknowledgeth **the Son** hath the Father also.

1 John 2:24
Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in **the Son**, and in the Father.

1 John 3:8
He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. **For this purpose the Son of God was manifested**, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

1 John 3:23
And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the **name of his Son** Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

1 John 4:9
In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that **God sent his only begotten Son** into the world, that we might live through him.

1 John 4:10
Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, **and sent his Son** to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:14
And we have seen and do testify that **the Father sent the Son** to be the Saviour of the world.

1 John 4:15
Whosoever shall confess that **Jesus is the Son of God**, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

1 John 5:5
Who is he that overcometh the world, **but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God**?

1 John 5:9
If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God **which he hath testified of his Son**

1 John 5:10
He that believeth on **the Son of God** hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; **because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son**.

1 John 5:11
And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and **this life is in his Son**.

1 John 5:12
He that hath **the Son** hath life; and **he that hath not the Son of God hath not life**.

1 John 5:13
These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of **the Son of God**; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of **the Son of God**.

1 John 5:20
And we know that **the Son of God is come**, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in **his Son** Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

2 John 1:3
Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, **the Son of the Father**, in truth and love.

2 John 1:9
Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath **both the Father and the Son**.

Revelation 2:18
And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith **the Son of God**, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;