

The Son of God in the Synoptic Gospels

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Triniterians and Unitarians alike incorrectly associate the title “Son of God” with the Virgin birth. For Trinitarians, “God the Son” became “the Son of God” by means of the incarnation. For Unitarians, who deny the incarnation and preexistence of the Son, the human Jesus was “the Son of God” in an adopted sense, not by literally being “begotten” out of God.

Both Trinitarians and Unitarians seem to have missed the obvious point that a “begotten Son” can only be of the same “kind” as the one who fathered him. This principle is abundantly obvious in the creation account, where all living things procreate according to “kind.”¹ The Jewish concept of “begetting” and “fathering” is illustrated by Paul in Hebrews 7. He claimed that Levi was in the loins of Abraham when Melchizedek met him, and thus participated in Abraham’s paying tithes to Melchizedek. In fact, the entire human race was created in Adam’s loins. The concept of “begetting” by a father necessarily implies that one’s prior existence was merely as a part of his father, but not as a conscious person. “Begetting” by a father was this portion of the father being separated from the father and becoming a distinct person. Therefore, similar terminology relating to the Son of God, such as “begotten,”² “only-begotten Son,”³ “only-begotten of the Father,”⁴ “First-begotten,”⁵ and “only begotten Son of God,”⁶ should be understood by default as referring to a Son begotten of the same “kind” as the Father Himself. Unfortunately, this will not work for Trinitarians, since the incarnation was not really a “begetting” by the Father, but only by Mary. For Trinitarians, Jesus who already existed distinct from the Father, merely added human flesh, yet remained the same divine Person that He was prior to the incarnation. But this concept is not “begetting” by the Father Himself. Similarly, for Unitarians, who deny that Jesus was deity in any sense but was created by God in the womb of Mary, He was therefore a special creation of God, not literally His “only-begotten Son.”

Both Trinitarians and Unitarians point to Luke 1:34-35 as proof that the title “Son of God” refers to the conception of Christ in the womb of Mary.

¹ γένος – genos, (Gen. 1:11,12,21,24,25)

² Psalm 2:7

³ John 3:16

⁴ John 1:14

⁵ Col. 1:15

⁶ John 3:18

Luke 1:30-35

30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. 32 "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 "And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; **therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.**

However, what exactly does the term "therefore" point back to? Was it "you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son?" Or was it the immediately preceding statement, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you?" In the context, it is clearly this later statement. This statement forms a parallelism, which was extremely common in the Old Testament, particularly the poetic books. In this construction, the second statement restates the first using different words.

The **Holy Spirit** will **come upon** you
the **power of the Highest** will **overshadow** you

The nouns "Holy Spirit" and "Power of the Highest" are parallel to each other. The verbs "come upon" and "overshadow" are parallel to each other.

We could restate this as follows without distorting the meaning:

"The Holy Spirit, the Power of the Highest, will come upon and overshadow you."

The glaringly obvious problem for Trinitarians is that their interpretation of this passage makes the **third Person** of the Trinity the Father of Jesus, not the one He repeatedly called "Father." The problem for Unitarians is that "come upon" and "overshadow" is not the language of procreation. There is a huge disconnect between these statements and the following one, "therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." Unitarians are forced to take the title "Son of God" in some sort of metaphorical sense, since they deny that Jesus was literally fathered by God Himself (which would make Him of the same God-kind), and is impossible in their theology of a purely human Jesus.

Who exactly is the subject? What is meant by the terms "holy Spirit" and "Power of the Highest?" And what is meant by the verbs "come upon" and "overshadow?" Of course,

for Trinitarians, the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. For Unitarians, the holy Spirit is an extension of the Father.

But if terms like “only-begotten Son of God” and “begotten of the Father” require a likeness in “kind” for the Son, and since “God IS Spirit,”⁷ why would not the holy Spirit here refer to the preincarnate Son Himself, the one called Logos? Did not Paul refer to the Son with the following words: “Christ the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.”⁸ “Wisdom” in relation to the preincarnate Son is a reference to Prov. 8:22-31. Paul’s companion Luke also referred to Christ by this title in 11:49 “Therefore the Wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute.’” Jesus attributed this statement to Himself in Matt. 23:34. Thus, Wisdom is a title for Jesus. So also is the title “Power of God.”

Also, that Logos as “Spirit” was God’s agent in creation can be shown from the following statement.

Psalm 32:6 LXX τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου οἱ οὐρανοὶ ἐστερεώθησαν καὶ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ πᾶσα ἡ δύναμις αὐτῶν

Literally: “Through Logos of the Lord the heavens were made, and through the Spirit/Breath of His mouth, all the Power of Him.”

The word “Power” is δύναμις, and is used many times in the LXX in reference to an army. In Psalm 45:8 it refers to the armies of angels. In Joshua 5:14, Joshua met the Messenger of YHVH who referred to Himself as: ἐγὼ ἀρχιστράτηγος δυνάμεως κυρίου, literally, “I am Chief Captain of the Power of the Lord.”

The Son of God is also referred to as God’s Spirit/Breath in Isaiah 48. Here God was speaking to Isaiah through His agent, the Messenger of YHVH to Isaiah.

Isaiah 48:11-13,16

11 “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will do it; For how should My name be profaned? And I will not give My glory to another.

12 Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I am He, I am the First, I am also the Last.

13 Indeed My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, And My right hand has stretched out the heavens; When I call to them, They stand up together. ...

⁷ John 4:24

⁸ 1 Cor 1:24

16 "Come near to Me, hear this: I have not spoken in secret *from the beginning; From the time that it was, I was there. And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit Have sent Me.*"

Verses 11-13 has the Messenger of YHVH delivering the words of YHVH Himself. But notice that in verse 16, the Messenger of YHVH speaks His own words, declaring that He was sent by YHVH. He says that He was present with YHVH "from the beginning," when YHVH laid the foundations of the earth. But now YHVH has sent Him to deliver this message.

There is a significant difference between how the NKJV and NASB translate the last sentence of verse 16:

NKJV "*And now the Lord GOD and His Spirit Have sent Me.*"

NASB "*And now the Lord God has sent Me, and His Spirit.*"

The NKJV has "*the Lord God and His Spirit*" sending "*Me,*" but the NASB has "*the Lord God*" alone sending "*Me, and His Spirit.*" The Hebrew can be interpreted either way. But the Septuagint has: καὶ νῦν κύριος ἀπέσταλκέν με καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ. The neuter term τὸ πνεῦμα (the Spirit/Breath) is inflected the same whether it is the subject or object of the verb. However, the verb ἀπέσταλκέν is singular, meaning that its subject must be singular. That is, whoever is "sending" must be a single entity. This is apparently why the NASB translates the verb as "has sent" (singular), following the LXX's more specific interpretation, but the NKJV renders it "have sent" (plural). The word "and" (καὶ) means "also" or "even." The correct meaning in English following the LXX's clearer meaning should be, "*And now the Lord has sent Me – even His Breath.*" The Messenger of YHVH referred to Himself as God's Spirit/Breath.

In Revelation 2:8, Jesus referred to Himself as "*the First and the Last*" (citing this passage), which shows that He was the one who spoke these words to Isaiah as the Messenger of YHVH, that He was "*from the beginning*" when God "*laid the foundations of the earth.*" Yet, Jesus adds, "*who died and came to life.*" He therefore showed that He was both the divine Son of God from the beginning, but also died and was resurrected as Man. However, what is critical to our study is that the Messenger of YHVH is also called God's "Breath/Spirit." This is the "Spirit of Christ" that was among the prophets.⁹

Consequently, both titles used by Luke, "*holy Spirit/Breath*" and "*Power of the Highest,*" aptly apply to the preincarnate Son. The one who spoke to Isaiah, who delivered God's

⁹ 1 Pet. 1:11

words, “I am the First and the Last,” who was “in the beginning” when God “laid the foundations of the earth,” whom God sent to Isaiah as His “Spirit/Breath,” is the one who “came upon” and “overshadowed” Mary. In doing so, He “emptied Himself” in order to “become in the likeness of men.”¹⁰ “Logos became flesh and dwelled among us.”¹¹

This is also how the earliest Christians understood Luke 1:35, that the “Power of God” and the “holy Spirit/Breath,” referred to Logos (Word) Himself.

Justin Martyr:

*“This, then, ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive,’ signifies that a virgin should conceive without intercourse. For if she had had intercourse with any one whatever, she was no longer a virgin; but **the Power of God having come upon the virgin, overshadowed her**, and caused her while yet a virgin to conceive. And the angel of God who was sent to the same virgin at that time brought her good news, saying, ‘Behold, **thou shalt conceive of the Holy Spirit**, and shalt bear a Son, and He shall be called **the Son of the Highest**, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins,’¹² — as they who have recorded all that concerns our Savior Jesus Christ have taught, whom we believed, since by Isaiah also, whom we have now adduced, the Spirit of prophecy declared that He should be born as we intimated before. **It is wrong, therefore, to understand the Spirit and the Power¹³ of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first-born of God**, as the foresaid prophet Moses declared; and **it was this which, when it came upon the virgin and overshadowed her, caused her to conceive, not by intercourse, but by Power.**”¹⁴*

Theophilus of Antioch:

*“Hear what I say. The God and Father, indeed, of all cannot be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but His Word, through whom He made all things, **being His Power and His Wisdom**, assuming the Person of the Father and Lord of all, went to the garden in the Person of God, and conversed with Adam. For the divine writing itself teaches us that Adam said that he had heard the voice. But what else*

¹⁰ Phil. 2:5-8

¹¹ John 1:14

¹² Quoting Matt. 1:20-21

¹³ Both “the Spirit and the Power” are held by Justin to be the same thing – the Word (Logos). Justin derived these two terms from the parallelism found in Luke 1:35: “the Holy Spirit will come upon you” and “the power of the Highest will overshadow you.” That Justin viewed this passage as a parallelism is proven by his application of both terms to the Logos, the preincarnate Son.

¹⁴ Justin Martyr, First Apology, ch. xxxiii

is this voice but the Word of God, who is also His Son? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counsellor, being His own mind and thought. But when God wished to make all that he determined on, He begot this Word, uttered, the First-born of all creation, not Himself being emptied of the Word, but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with His Reason. And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-bearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, "The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence." The Word then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place."¹⁵

"God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own Wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called "governing principle," because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him. He, then, being Spirit of God, and governing principle, and Wisdom, and Power of the Highest, came down upon the prophets, and through them spoke of the creation of the world and of all other things. For the prophets were not when the world came into existence, but the Wisdom of God which was in Him, and His holy Word which was always present with Him. Wherefore He speaks thus by the prophet Solomon: "When He prepared the heavens I was there, and when He appointed the foundations of the earth I was by Him as one brought up with Him."¹⁶

Irenaeus:

For He is indeed Savior, as being the Son and Word of God; but salutary, since [He is] Spirit; for he says: 'The Spirit of our countenance, Christ the Lord.'¹⁷ But salvation, as being flesh: for 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' This knowledge of salvation, therefore, John did impart to those repenting, and believing in the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world."¹⁸

¹⁵ Theophilus, To Autolytus, Bk. II, ch. xxii

¹⁶ Theophilus, To Autolytus, Bk. II, ch. x

¹⁷ Quoting Lamentations, 4:20 LXX

¹⁸ Irenaeus, Book III, ch. x, ii

Tertullian:

*“Again, although denying His birth from such cohabitation, the passage¹⁹ did not deny that He was born of real flesh; it rather affirmed this, by the very fact that it did not deny His birth in the flesh in the same way that it denied His birth from sexual intercourse. Pray, tell me, **why the Spirit of God descended INTO a woman’s womb at all, if He did not do so for the purpose of partaking of flesh from the womb.** For He could have become spiritual flesh without such a process, — much more simply, indeed, without the womb than in it. He had no reason for enclosing Himself within one, if He was to bear forth nothing from it. **Not without reason, however, did He descend into a womb. Therefore He received (flesh) therefrom;** else, if He received nothing therefrom, His descent into it would have been without a reason, especially if He meant to become flesh of that sort which was not derived from a womb, that is to say, a spiritual one.”²⁰*

It was because the Son of God came upon Mary as Spirit/Breath and Power, and was transformed to humanity in her womb, that the child born from her would be called “the Son of God.” This is not because God had sex with Mary. But because she was the one through whom the Son of God became flesh, Son of Man.

Now if this ancient interpretation of Luke 1:35 is correct, then we would expect that references in the synoptic Gospels that speak of the “Son of God” would in their contexts refer to His great and mighty rank as outlined in the Old Testament, and not to His lowly birth from Mary. And indeed, this is exactly what we find.

Matthew’s Gospel

While the title “Son of Man” is abundant in Matthew, always in reference to Jesus humanity from Mary, the title “Son of God” is relatively rare. And it never refers to the virgin birth. It always refers to something much greater than a human conception without the presence of a father. Matthew begins his Gospel with the birth narrative. While he did not use the title “Son of God” in this instance, he did report something significant regarding who Jesus really was.

Matthew 1:18-23

*18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, **she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.***

¹⁹ Tertullian was discussing John 1:13, which has a variant reading, “Who was born” (singular – referring to Christ) vs. “Who were born” (plural – referring to Christians).

²⁰ Tertullian, On the Flesh of Christ, XIX

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

21 "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

What does it mean in verse 18, "she was found with child of the Holy Spirit," and again in verse 20, "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit?" It does not mean that a third Person of a Trinity had sex with Mary. Nor does it mean that the Father created a sperm and used it to impregnate Mary. The Greek reads in verse 18, εὐρέθη ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα **ἐκ** πνεύματος ἁγίου – literally, "she was found holding in the belly **out of** the holy Breath." Again in verse 20, the Greek reads, τὸ γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ γεννηθὲν **ἐκ** πνεύματος ἔστιν ἁγίου – Literally, "For what has been generated in her is **out of** the holy Breath." The preposition ἐκ means "out from within," or "out from among," as separated from the object of the preposition. This implies the one in her womb was a separation from, as having been a part of, the holy Breath.

Matthew then states that this was done to fulfill Isaiah 7:14, where the name "Immanuel" is given to the Son. Matthew was quoting from the LXX which reads: ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Εμμανουηλ. Literally, "Look, the virgin will hold in the belly, and will give birth to a Son, and you will call the name of Him Emmanuel." Matthew then translated the Hebrew name Emmanuel as "God with us." Thus, the one called "God with us" was "out of" (separated from) the holy Breath, and was then "held" in the belly of Mary, until she gave birth to Him. This is the literal sense of what is said in Matthew. It agrees perfectly with the original interpretation of Luke 1:35, that the Son as "holy Spirit" and "Power of the Highest" came upon Mary and was carried in her womb and was born as Jesus. For this reason He is to be called the "Son of God."

As we now consider each time the term "Son of God" is used in Matthew, and each time God is called His Father, it quickly becomes evident that none of these references has anything to do with Jesus' origin via the virgin birth. Rather, all of them have to do with His origin as the Son who appears mysteriously in the Old Testament as God's personal agent and proxy.

The first indication in Matthew that Jesus was the Son of God is when the voice from heaven came at Jesus' baptism.

Matt. 3:16-17

*16 When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. 17 And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "**This is My beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased."*

This statement was obviously meant to identify Jesus as the "Son" of God in Psalm 2:7-8. "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, '**You are My Son, Today I have begotten You**. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.'" In this statement, the Son of God is identified as having been "begotten" out of God Himself on a particular day, thus must have been of the same God-kind. The voice from heaven, which referenced this passage and identified Jesus as this "Son of God," shows that Jesus was God's "begotten" Son. He was not merely a son by adoption (Unitarians), nor was He "God the Son" as co-equal with the Father (Trinitarians). Rather, the term "My beloved Son" is relational, that He was the literal offspring of the Father who spoke from heaven, having been "begotten" by Him.

Those witnessing Jesus' baptism and hearing the voice from heaven were not confined to humans. Satan and his minions also heard this declaration from heaven.

Matthew 4:1-11

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry.

*3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "**If You are the Son of God**, command that these stones become bread."*

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,

*6 and said to Him, "**If You are the Son of God**, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"*

7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

The first challenges to Jesus' being the "Son of God" came from the lips of Satan. It was not that Satan doubted whether or not He was the "Son of God," and that Jesus needed to prove it to Satan. Rather, he was saying, since you are the Son of God, why do you need to fast for forty days? Turn these stones to bread and relieve your hunger. In the second temptation, Satan implied that since He was the Son of God, God would not allow Him to be injured by jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple. Satan was telling Him to display His glory publically. Finally, Satan gave Him the opportunity to receive all the kingdoms promised to Him in Psalm 2 without waiting for the fulfillment at the proper time. This shows that Satan knew the prophecy of Psalm 2, that He was God's "begotten" Son who was promised all the kingdoms of the world. After His temptation, Matthew adds that the angels came and ministered to Him, implying that in some sense He was already their superior.

The second time this term is used also comes from the dark side, from demons.

Matt. 8:28-29

28 When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.

29 And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

Did Satan and his minions fear a virgin-born man? Did they fear a man filled with the Spirit/Breath of God? Or did they fear the one who bore the name of God all throughout the Old Testament? The statement, "have You come here to torment us before the time?" indicates that they knew Jesus was to be their judge. This is not something that stems from the virgin birth.

The next instance comes from Jesus Himself.

Matt. 11:27

27 "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

Here Jesus claimed to have intimate knowledge of the Father. The Greek term ἐπιγινώσκει means to have full knowledge. This kind of knowledge would normally require personal interaction with the Father. And indeed this is what Jesus meant, as is shown from John 6:46, “not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father.”

The next time the name “Son of God” appears in Matthew comes from an admission of the disciples, referring again to Psalm 2:7, “You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.”

Matt. 14:24-33

24 But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary.

25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.

26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear.

27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.”

28 And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.”

29 So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.

30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!”

31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

*33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “**Truly You are the Son of God.**”*

The confession and realization of Jesus as the Son of God had nothing to do with His virgin birth. Rather, it reflected His status as the one who had authority over nature itself.

The next occasion was at Jesus’ trial, whether Jesus really was the “Son of God.”

Matt. 26:63-64

*63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, “I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, **the Son of God!**”*

64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the **Son of Man** sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."

The question posed to Jesus concerned Psalm 2, "Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Their question was whether Jesus was the "Son" who was "begotten" out of God, thus of the God-kind, deity. But Jesus' reply instead used the title "Son of Man," referencing Daniel 7:13-14,22,26-27, the one who would come with the clouds and receive the Kingdom as "Son of Man." In doing this, Jesus turned their argument against them. They had trouble believing that the Son of God of Psalm 2 could be a human being, as Jesus clearly was. By citing Daniel 7, Jesus showed that the same one who is called God's "begotten" Son in Psalm 2, who will rule over all the nations, is the one called "Son of Man" in Daniel's prophecy, to whom the Kingdom will be delivered. Thus the "Son of God" of Psalm 2 had to become the "Son of Man" of Daniel 7 in order to receive the Kingdom as Messiah.

Finally, we have a similar situation at His crucifixion. They had heard Jesus' statement concerning building the Temple in three days, thinking that this was an absurd claim of personal deity. But they were mistaken.

Matt. 27:39-43,54

39 *And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads*

40 *and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! **If You are the Son of God**, come down from the cross."*

41 *Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said,*

42 *"He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.*

43 *"He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, **I am the Son of God.**" ...*

54 *So when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, **Truly this was the Son of God!**"*

In none of these instances does the title "Son of God" have any reference to the virgin birth, but is always a reference to His origin when He "issued forth out of God."²¹

²¹ John 8:42 Gk. ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξηλθον, lit. "For I out of God issued forth."

Mark's Gospel

Mark began his Gospel account with the following statement:

Mark 1:1-3

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2 As it is written in the Prophets: "Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, Who will prepare Your way before You."

3 "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"

Mark immediately identified Jesus by both titles found in Psalm 2, God's "Anointed" (Christ)²² and the begotten Son of God.²³ However, Mark then referenced two very important prophecies. The first is from Malachi 3:1.

Malachi 3:1

1 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

The first "messenger" was John the Baptist. He came to prepare the way "before Me" – the one speaking who is called "Jehovah of hosts." Thus, in some sense the one for whom John prepared the way was YHVH Himself! Yet, it is clear that the Father Himself did not come. Rather, as in a host of examples in the Torah, the Messenger of YHVH came on His behalf in His name. Here He is called "the Lord whom you seek," and "the Messenger of the Covenant." This is the one who confirmed the covenant with Abraham,²⁴ who appeared in the burning bush to Moses,²⁵ and who gave the Law at Mt. Sinai.²⁶ This is what earned Him the name "Messenger of the Covenant." Additionally, Isaiah 9:6 (LXX) refers to the child born as "The Messenger of Great Counsel."²⁷

Next Mark cited Isaiah 40:3. Here it is in context:

Isaiah 40:3-5

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God."

²² Psalm 2:2

²³ Psalm 2:7

²⁴ Gen. 22:11-18

²⁵ Ex. 3:2ff; Acts 7:30

²⁶ Acts 7:38

²⁷ μεγάλης βουλής ἄγγελος (Isa 9:6 LXX)

*4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth;
5 The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

Isaiah's prophecy clearly stated that John would prepare the way for YHVH! Again, as in Malachi 3:1, the one coming is called by the name of YHVH Himself. And this can be none other than the Messenger of YHVH.

Exodus 23:20-23

*20 "Behold, I send [My Messenger]²⁸ before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; **for My name is in Him.** 22 "But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. 23 For My [Messenger] will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and **I will cut them off.***

What the Messenger of YHVH does, YHVH Himself is said to have done. This is consistent in the Torah, since the Messenger of YHVH carries His name and authority. Consequently, by using titles from Psalm 2, and by citing both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3-5, Mark has clearly identified Jesus Christ as the "Anointed one" (Christ) of Psalm 2:2, as the "Begotten Son of God" of Psalm 2:7, as "Me" (YHVH of hosts) and "the Lord whom you seek," and "the Messenger of the Covenant" (who appeared to Abraham, Moses, and others), in whom was the name and authority of YHVH (according to Mal. 3:1), as well as "YHVH" and "our God" from Isaiah 40:3. There is simply no way to explain these things adequately in either Trinitarianism or Unitarianism. The Jesus of Mark's Gospel is far more than a mere man. He is the Messenger of YHVH, His personal representative, the Son of God, who has come as Son of Man. The only other two occurrences of this title in Mark are parallel to Matthew.²⁹

Luke's Gospel

In Luke, the first occurrence is the one discussed at the beginning of this paper. The reason the one born of Mary was to be called "Son of God" was because He came upon and overshadowed Mary as both "Spirit" and "Power" of God. All of the other occurrences are also parallel to Matthew.³⁰

²⁸ LXX

²⁹ Mark 3:11; Mark 15:39

³⁰ Luke 4:3,9; Luke 4:49; Luke 22:70

Finally, John's Gospel has much to say about who this Son of God actually is, and where He came from. We will reserve this for a separate article.

In conclusion, the claim by Unitarians that the synoptic Gospels contain nothing that alludes to Christ as having divine origins or preexistence is demonstrably false. Every time the term "the Son of God" appears in the Bible, it carries with it the concept of Christ's true origin, as mentioned in Psalm 2, the one Paul called "*the first-begotten of all creation*,"³¹ which is so well expressed in the opening verses of Mark's Gospel. The expression "Son of God" always refers to Christ's origin out of God as "*the Beginning*," but the title "Son of Man" always refers to and stresses His having become fully human to die on our behalf and to reign as perfected Man.

That Christ was "Son of God" (begotten out of God) long before He became "Son of Man" (begotten by Mary) is attested by some of the earliest Christian writers as Apostolic tradition. Here is one example from Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp, disciple of John.

*"For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and **He who was the Son of God became the Son of man**, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that might receive the adoption of sons? ... Now, the Scriptures would not have testified these things of Him, if, like others, He had been a mere man. **But that He had, beyond all others, in Himself that pre-eminent birth which is from the Most High Father, and also experienced that pre-eminent generation which is from the Virgin**, the divine Scriptures do in both respects testify of Him"³²*

The earliest Christians closest to the Apostles testify that Jesus was procreated twice, once out of God His Father as "Son of God," then afterward out of Mary His mother as "Son of Man." A careful and unbiased analysis of the Scriptures affirms this. The truth demolishes the Catholic Trinitarian doctrine of hypostatic union and that Mary is "the Mother of God." It also demolishes the Unitarian doctrine that Christ had no divine preexistence. Both of these views were spawned by perverting the Scriptures.

³¹ Col. 1:15

³² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. III, ch. xix