

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. Unitarians deny the preexistence of the Son and thus His transformation to humanity, claiming that Jesus was “the Son of God” only in an adopted sense not literally begotten out of God. Both groups must deny the obvious meaning of certain biblical terminology in order to maintain their theology regarding God and Jesus. Those critical terms are “Son of God,” “begotten” (of God,) and Jesus’ having come forth “out of God.”

Gabriel’s Statement to Mary

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

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.**”*

According to both Trinitarians and Unitarians, Jesus being called “the Son of God” would result from a creative act which is nowhere mentioned in this verse. In both Trinitarianism and Unitarianism, the word “therefore” (as the reason why Jesus would be called “the Son of God”) must point to something that is assumed and not actually stated. In other words, both Trinitarians and Unitarians are using circular reasoning. Both assume that Gabriel meant that the “Holy Spirit” would perform a creative miracle in Mary’s womb which supplied what was missing – a male sperm. Thus both take the word “therefore” as referring to this alleged **creation** by the “Holy Spirit.” Yet no creative activity is stated in the passage at all. Rather, a divine entity (called “Spirit” and “Power”) was to “come upon” and “overshadow” Mary.

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Gabriel’s statement, “*the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you*” forms a parallelism, something extremely common in Jewish literature especially in the Old Testament poetic books. In this construction, the second statement restates the first using different words, rather than describing two distinct things.

*The **holy Spirit/Breath** will **come upon** you*
*The **power of the Highest** will **overshadow** you*

The nouns (subject) “holy Spirit/Breath” and “Power of the Highest” are parallel to each other. The verbs “come upon” and “overshadow” are parallel to each other. The full meaning would be “*the holy Spirit/Breath, the Power of the Highest, will come upon, overshadow you.*”

The first 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 His “Father.” Also, “come upon” and “overshadow” are not terms normally related to procreation in Scripture or to a special divine creative act. Both Trinitarians and Unitarians have apparently given no thought to a more literal understanding of Gabriel’s statement, that the Person spoken of as the “holy Breath/Spirit” who is also the “Power of the Highest” is actually God’s Son, the Word (Logos), who in “coming upon” and “overshadowing” Mary described His own act of becoming human in her womb, as “the Word became flesh,”¹ and that in doing so He “emptied Himself” of the “form of God.”²

Trinitarians immediately reject this idea because of their doctrine of the “Holy Spirit” as the third Person of the Trinity, not the second Person. Unitarians immediately reject it because of their view that the “holy Spirit” is always an extension of the Father alone, since they have rejected the preexistence of Logos as a Person sharing in the same “kind” (essence) of God which is said to be “Spirit/Breath.”

But since terms like “only-begotten Son of God” and “begotten of the Father” normally require a likeness in “kind” for “the Son of God,” and since “God IS Spirit,”³ why would not the “holy Spirit” and “Power of the Highest” in Gabriel’s announcement refer to the preincarnate Son Himself, the one called Logos? There are very good biblical reasons to suppose so.

¹ John 1:14

² Phil. 2:5-6

³ John 4:24

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1. Paul referred to the Son with the following words: “Christ the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.”⁴ In this passage, “Power of God” is a title for the Son corresponding closely to Gabriel’s “Power of the Highest.” “Wisdom” was a reference to Prov. 8:22-31, God’s companion in creation whom He “begat” and who then assisted Him in creating all things. 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,’” and Jesus attributed this statement to Himself in Matt. 23:34. Thus, “Wisdom” is a title for Jesus, as also the title “Power of God.”

2. Also, that “Logos” as both “Spirit” and “Power” of God, God’s agent in creation, can be shown from David’s Psalm.

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

Literally: “Through the Logos of the Lord the heavens were made, and through the Spirit/Breath of His mouth, all the Power of Him.”⁵

The word “Power” is δύναμις, and is used of persons 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.” Thus in this Psalm we have God’s “Logos,” His “Spirit,” and His “Power” used interchangeably as the agent of creation!

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

⁴ 1 Cor 1:24

⁵ All three terms have the definite article which is in the dative case which implies the preposition διὰ “through.”

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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, who called Himself *“the First and the Last”* referred to Himself as God’s Spirit/Breath.

Also in Revelation 1:17 & Revelation 2:8 Jesus referred to Himself as *“the First and the Last”* (citing this very passage). This shows that He was the one who spoke these words to Isaiah as the Messenger of God, that He was *“from the beginning”* when God *“laid the foundations of the earth”* according to Isaiah 48:13,16. Yet, Jesus adds, *“who died and came to life.”* He therefore showed that He was both the divine preincarnate 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 God is also called God’s “Breath/Spirit” by Isaiah. This is the “Spirit of Christ” that was among the prophets.⁶

⁶ 1 Pet. 1:11

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4. Paul referred to the “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of Christ” interchangeably in the very same passage, borrowing from the previous Old Testament Scriptures!

Rom. 8:9

*9 But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed **the Spirit of God** dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have **the Spirit of Christ**, he is not His.*

Again, Paul uses an even bolder statement to identify the Son with the term “Spirit.”

2 Cor. 3:14-18

12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech--

13 unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

5. Finally, in John’s Gospel, Jesus equated the coming of the “Spirit of Truth” as His own coming upon His Apostles in an invisible way.

John 14:16-18

*16 “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – 17 **the Spirit of truth**, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; **I will come to you.**”*

Of course, Logos’ as “Spirit/Breath” in the Old Testament is not the same thing as these statements by Paul and John above. The former referred to a second divine Person as “Spirit/Breath” of God. The latter indicate the invisible presence of Jesus as extended to us from the Father’s right hand by means of a portion of God essence, which is “Spirit/Breath.” Yet, the close association between “Spirit/Breath” and the Son in both Testaments shows that assuming a hard dichotomy between the Son and Spirit is a mistake. It is this supposed (but incorrect) hard dichotomy that underlies both the Trinitarian and Unitarian understanding of Gabriel’s statement to Mary.

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Consequently, there is solid biblical precedent from both the Old and New Testaments for taking the titles used by Gabriel to Mary, the “*holy Spirit/Breath*” and “*Power of the Highest,*” as simply terms for the preincarnate Son Himself, begotten as God’s companion at “the beginning,” who was therefore God’s “Son” even before He became flesh. It is no stretch to say that the one who spoke to Isaiah saying, “*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 same one who “*came upon*” and “*overshadowed*” Mary. In doing so, He “*emptied Himself*” in order to “*become in the likeness of men.*”⁷ “*Logos became flesh and dwelled among us.*”⁸

Jewish Interpretation

The interpretation of Proverbs 8 as referring to Wisdom as a real Person was also known within Judaism prior to the Christian era. “Wisdom” as a divine Person distinct from God Himself was referred to in apocryphal literature using the same language used by Gabriel in Luke 1:35. In the “Wisdom of Solomon” (exactly as in Proverbs 8) “Wisdom” speaks in the first person as a distinct Person. The Jewish Encyclopedia states: “[W]isdom is introduced in vi. 9-25 as the speaker, and as the one who bestows the divine kingdom and confers immortality (vi. 20-21).”⁹ In the seventh chapter the Jewish writer referred to this person called “Wisdom” as “*the Spirit/Breath of the Power of God,*” being an “*effluence* (meaning “emergence” or discharge) of His glory.”¹⁰ This apocryphal book was well-known in first century Judaism. Mary herself could easily have been familiar with it. She certainly was familiar with the Old Testament passages quoted above, especially Psalm 32:6 LXX which uses both terms plus Logos, linking all three as the agent through whom God created everything.

Earliest Christian Interpretation

The earliest Christian writers after the Apostles understood Proverbs 8’s “Wisdom” to be the preincarnate Son of God, begotten as “the Beginning”¹¹ of God’s deeds in the creation week. They also understood Gabriel’s statement as referring to the preincarnate Son of God descending into the womb of Mary. “Logos” who is also called “Wisdom” was the “*Power of God*” and the “*holy Spirit/Breath*” who came upon Mary and overshadowed her. Consequently, Gabriel’s statement, “*therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God,*” meant that He was called “*the Son of God*” due to

⁷ Phil. 2:5-8

⁸ John 1:14

⁹ Jewish Encyclopedia article on The Wisdom of Solomon

¹⁰ Wisdom of Solomon 7:25, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/29-wissal-nets.pdf>

¹¹ See Prov. 8:22,25 LXX

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His preexistence and former begetting (as in Prov. 8) rather than because God somehow “begat” a Son Himself at the time of Jesus birth in Bethlehem.

Justin Martyr of Rome:

*“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 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*

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

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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 of Lyon:

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

“And in another place Jeremiah says: ‘The Spirit of our face, the Lord Christ;’ and how He was taken in their snares, of whom we said, ‘Under his shadow we shall live among the Gentiles.’ That, being (the) Spirit of God, Christ was to become a suffering man the Scripture declares; and is, as it were, amazed and astonished at His sufferings, that in such manner He was to endure sufferings, under whose shadow we said that we should

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

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

¹⁷ Quoting Lamentations, 4:20 LXX

¹⁸ Irenaeus, Book III, ch. x, ii

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live. And by shadow he means His body. For just as a shadow is made by a body, so also Christ’s body was made by His Spirit.”¹⁹

Tertullian of Carthage:

*“Forasmuch, however, as it has been declared concerning the Son Himself, ‘Thou hast made Him a little lower than the angels,’ how will it appear that He put on the nature of angels if He was made lower than the angels, having become man, with flesh and soul as the Son of man? **As “the Spirit of God,” however, and “the Power of the Highest,”** can He be regarded as lower than the angels, — He who is verily God, and **the Son of God**? Well, but as bearing human nature, He is so far made inferior to the angels; but as bearing angelic nature, He to the same degree loses that inferiority.”²⁰*

*“And very properly, because Christ is **the Word of God**, and with the Word **the Spirit of God**, and by the Spirit **the Power of God**, and whatsoever else appertains to God. ... Again, although denying His birth from such cohabitation, the passage²¹ 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.”²²*

Hippolytus of Rome:

*“And before this there was no flesh in heaven. Who, then, was in heaven but the Word unincarnate, who was dispatched to show that He was upon earth and was also in heaven? **For He was Word, He was Spirit, He was Power.** The same took to Himself the name common and current among men, and was called from the beginning the Son of*

¹⁹ Irenaeus, *Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, lxx-lxxi

²⁰ Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, XIV

²¹ 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).

²² Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ*, XIX

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man on account of what He was to be, although He was not yet man, as Daniel testifies when he says, “I saw, and behold one like the Son of man came on the clouds of heaven.” Rightly, then, did he say that He who was in heaven was called from the beginning by this name, the Word of God, as being that from the beginning.”²³

Lactantius:

*“Therefore **the Holy Spirit of God, descending from heaven, chose the holy Virgin, that He might enter into her womb.** But she, being filled by the possession of the Divine Spirit, conceived; and without any intercourse with a man, her virgin womb was suddenly impregnated.”²⁴*

The earliest Christians understood Gabriel’s statement as indicating that Jesus as a Man would be called “Son of God” because the literal “Son of God” came upon Mary as “*the holy Spirit/Breath*” and “*the Power of the Highest*” and was transformed to humanity in her womb. So the title “Son of Man” does not fully disclose who He was, yet the title “Son of God” carries the message of His preexistence as having first been begotten out of God before being transformed to humanity. Also, since He is the same PERSON, yet transformed into a different KIND, He does not lose His identity as God’s only-begotten Son. In this way they reconciled the terms “Son of God” referring to His actual origin out of God at the “beginning,” yet also retained His new identity as “Son of Man” from His begetting by Mary.

The ancient Christian interpretation at the close of the apostolic age should not be easily dismissed by modern Christians. Instead, it ought to be tested by a very simple experiment. If that view is correct, we would expect to find that term “Son of God” in the Gospels should in their contexts appeal to His great and mighty rank as outlined in the Old Testament, and never specifically to His lowly birth from Mary. And indeed, this is exactly what we find. This is not to suggest that the writers of the synoptic Gospels fully understood these things when writing under inspiration. However, they made no mistakes. What Luke recorded that Gabriel said to Mary is exactly what he said.

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 (even

²³ Hippolytus, Against Noetus, ch. iv

²⁴ Lactantius, Divine Institutes, Bk. IV, ch. xii

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miraculous – without a human 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 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 something separated from the object of the preposition, formerly being part of the object of the preposition, the holy Breath. It fits quite well with the idea expressed in the quotes above, that some portion of the Spirit/Breath exited the remaining essence of divinity (with was shared by Father and Son) and became Mary’s Son.

Matthew then states that this was done to fulfill Isaiah 7:14, where the name “Immanuel” is given to Mary’s Son. Matthew was quoting from the LXX which reads: ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ. 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

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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 – His preexistence as “Spirit” and “Power” of God – He is to be called the “Son of God” even though He was fully human. It is not because God created “flesh” in Mary’s womb, which in no sense would make Him the actual “only-begotten Son” of God or the “only-begotten of the Father.”

As we now consider each time the term “Son of God” is used elsewhere in Matthew, and each time God is called Jesus’ Father, it quickly becomes evident that none of these references has anything to do with Jesus’ origin as a Man via the virgin birth. Rather, all of them have to do with His real origin as the Son (begotten of God as “the Beginning”), who appears mysteriously throughout the Old Testament as God’s personal agent, proxy, and intermediary with mankind.

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 called “Today.” Thus He was necessarily of the God-kind when He was “begotten,” and this was within TIME not eternity past. The voice from heaven referenced this passage and identified Jesus as this “begotten” Son of God. He was not merely a “son” by adoption (Unitarians), nor was He “God the Son” as co-equal and co-eternal with the Father (Trinitarians). Rather, the term “My beloved Son” is relational, meaning that He was the literal offspring of the Father who spoke from heaven, having been “begotten” by Him at some point, which Psalm 2 indicates was “Today.”

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It was not only humans who witnessed Jesus’ baptism and heard the voice from heaven. Satan and his minions also heard this declaration from heaven, as is evidenced from what they called Jesus.

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. He also heard the voice from heaven. Rather, he was saying that since you are the Son of God, why do you need to fast for forty days? Perform a miracle and turn these stones into 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, no doubt from God’s voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism. 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.

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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 merely filled with the Spirit/Breath of God? Or was their fear related to WHO He was, the one who bore the name of God (both Elohim and YHVH) 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 could be inferred 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 lengthy 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 by 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.”

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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. There was only one person in the Old Testament who could speak with the full authority of YHVH, even commanding nature²⁵ – the Messenger of YHVH.²⁶

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 included both titles found in 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, to whom the Father promised the Kingdom. But Jesus’ reply instead used a completely different title, “Son of Man.” This was a specific reference to Daniel 7:13-14,22,26-27, the one who would come with the clouds and receive the Kingdom as a human, “the 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.

²⁵ The Messenger of YHVH appeared as fire in the burning bush, which was not consumed, He parted the Red Sea, and gave water from “the Rock” (Ex. 3:2; Judges 2:1-4; 1 Cor. 10:4).

²⁶ Exod. 3:2; Exod. 23:20-23

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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. This is the implication of Jesus’ juxtaposition of terms that referred to Himself.

Finally, we have a similar situation at His crucifixion. They had heard Jesus’ statement concerning building the Temple in three days, supposing that this was a claim of personal divinity. 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. In each instance it points to His real origin, when He “issued forth out of God.”²⁷

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)²⁸ and the begotten “Son of God.”²⁹ He completely omitted any reference to the

²⁷ John 8:42 Gk. ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον, lit. “For I out of God issued forth.”

²⁸ Psalm 2:2

²⁹ Psalm 2:7

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virgin birth. Mark then immediately referenced two very important prophecies, both of which point to Jesus former divinity and preexistence. 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” of the speaker was John the Baptist. He came to prepare the way “before **Me**” – the one speaking through Malachi. And the one who came was clearly Jesus, not the Father according to Mark’s application of this passage. John the Baptist was “My messenger,” the one speaking. John was to prepare the way before “Me” (the one speaking through Malachi). Thus, the Son of God was the one speaking through Malachi about Himself, whom John the Baptist would prepare the way before Him when He finally came “to His Temple.” Just as in a host of examples in the Torah, the Messenger of YHVH came on YHVH’s 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,³⁰ who appeared in the burning bush to Moses³¹ and gave the Law at Mt. Sinai.³² 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*.”³³ Thus Mark’s introduction calls Jesus “the Son of God” and immediately identifies Him as the one who spoke through Malachi.

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**.”

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.”

³⁰ Gen. 22:11-18

³¹ Ex. 3:2ff; Acts 7:30

³² Acts 7:38

³³ μεγάλης βουλής ἄγγελος (Isa 9:6 LXX)

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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]³⁴ 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.³⁵

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.³⁶

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.

³⁴ LXX

³⁵ Mark 3:11; Mark 15:39

³⁶ Luke 4:3,9; Luke 4:49; Luke 22:70

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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-produced of all creation*,”³⁷ 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 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”³⁸*

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.

³⁷ Col. 1:15

³⁸ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Bk. III, ch. xix