

In Matthew 16:16, Peter called Jesus “The Son of the living God”. If we wonder why Jesus was called “The Son of God”, we need look no further than Luke 1:35. In that verse an angel explained to Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and that the power of the Most High would overshadow her; “And for that reason” the angel said, “the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.” But still, if Jesus was God (John 1:1), how could He also be “the Son of God”? In Jn 3:16, Jesus is called God’s “only begotten Son”. What would these expressions have meant to those who originally read them? What was the relationship between God the Father and God the Son? Let’s look first at the expression “only begotten”.

In the Greek, the word is monogenes. According to Thayer’s Lexicon, it means “single of its kind, only; used of only sons or only daughters (viewed in relation to their parents); used of Christ, denotes the one and only son of God.” Yet, there’s more to the expression than just this.

As we recall the life of Abraham, we remember that he had many offspring. His first-born was Ishmael, conceived through his wife’s handmaid, Hagar (Genesis 16:1-11). With his second wife, Keturah, Abraham had six more sons (Gen 25:1-4). Nevertheless, the Hebrew writer said that Isaac was Abraham’s “only begotten son” (Heb 11:17). Somehow, the term “only begotten” applied to Isaac even though Abraham had other sons. Perhaps the reason for this is because of the unique nature of Abraham’s relationship with Isaac. In Gen 17:15-19, God promised a 100 year old Abraham that he and his 90 year old wife would have a son whose name would be Isaac. God said that He would establish His covenant with Isaac as an everlasting covenant. When the Hebrew writer referred to Isaac as Abraham’s “only begotten son”, his emphasis was on the uniqueness of Isaac. He was like no other son of Abraham. He was one of a kind . . . unique.

This term is used of Jesus in the same way. Luke referred to Adam as “the son of God” (Luke 3:38), we are called “children of God” (I John 3:1); but Jesus is “the *only begotten* Son of God” (Jn 3:18) because His relationship with the Father is unique. His role in the plans of God is unlike any other’s. He is one of a kind; like no one else. To explain why, let’s look a little deeper.

We need to understand the way the Bible uses the expression “son of”. In II Kings 2:3 we read about a group of guys called “the sons of the prophets”. They were messengers of the prophet Elisha who would distribute his prophetic utterances throughout the land. When God spoke to Elisha, the prophet would then reveal the message to the “sons of the prophets” who would go from village to village repeating it so everyone could hear. They were not the actual sons of Elisha. The expression “sons of” denoted that they were “*representatives*” of the prophet.

Likewise, when Jesus is called “the son of man” in Mt 8:20, the title denotes that Jesus was a *representative of mankind* before Almighty God. He was a man, and as such He represented all of mankind before God as a sinless sacrifice for sins (II Cor 5:14-21). Offered as a token of righteousness, one man represented all other men in the atonement for sins.

We see a similar meaning for the term “son of God”. Jesus was not only a man, He was also God ... and as such He represented the entire Godhead before mankind. He said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). He said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me” (Jn 7:16). As a representative of God, Jesus came among us to show us what God is like and to teach us what God wants us to know. As a representative of mankind, Jesus came before God to atone for our sins. He was the son of man **and** He was the Son of God. As Paul said, he was the “one mediator ... between God and men” (I Tim 2:5). He was unique, one of kind. No one else has ever stood in His place, squarely between God and man, reconciling the two, making peace. Indeed, a representative of the Godhead “let go” of immortality to take on human form (Phil 2:5-8). As the “only begotten Son of God”, Jesus represented God as no one else ever has or could.