

The West End Herald

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC



What Does Begotten, Not Made Mean?

by Kevin DeYoung

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Only Begotten Son of the Father

The Nicene Creed confesses that the Lord Jesus Christ is “the only begotten Son of God.” The Greek word translated “only begotten” is *monogenēs*, a word used five times in the New Testament with reference to Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9).

While most newer translations render the term “only” or “one of a kind,” the King James Version uses “only begotten” in those five Johannine verses. Whatever the proper translation of the word is in each of those five biblical instances, every English translation I’ve ever seen of the Nicene Creed renders the word “only begotten.”

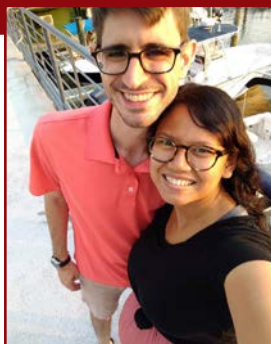
Let’s think about the names “Father” and “Son.” God is Father because he has a Son; Jesus is the Son because he has a Father. That much should be obvious. And the way in which the Father relates to the Son is by “begetting.” The Father generates the Son, and the Son is “from the substance of the Father” (Creed of Nicaea). One thing we can say about the Father that we cannot say about the Son is that the Father is unbegotten. One thing we can say about the Son that we cannot say about the Father is that the Son is begotten.

Okay, but what does that all mean?

The Arians agreed that Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. This specific language wasn’t the issue. The issue was what those words meant. In a letter to Alexander, bishop of Alexandria, Arius explained that God was “the begetter of his only Son before endless ages; through whom he made both the ages and all that is.” Arius would not have objected to saying, as the Nicene Creed does, that Christ was “begotten of his Father before all worlds.” But in the letter to Alexander, Arius also argued that the Son, “timelessly begotten by the Father,” was “created and established before all ages” and “did not exist prior to his begetting.”¹ To counter this position, the Nicene Creed made four further statements in definition of “only begotten.” But sanctification explicitly includes these co-operations, making the description of “alone” misleading at best and inaccurate at worst. We are apt to misunderstand both justification and sanctification if we describe them in ways that are too similar.

The Son is “God of God.” The phrase “God of God” is not a superlative like “Holy of Holies” or “King of kings” or “Lord of lords.” The “of” here might better be translated “from,” speaking of derivation. Jesus Christ is God *from* God, and the fact that God is used in both halves of the formula suggests

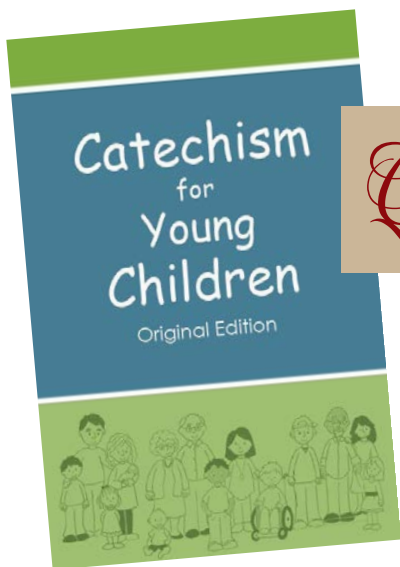
Alex & Eska D.



Alexander D. is a graduate of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (2024). He is an accomplished pianist and has served as a pastoral intern and Music Director at Palmetto Hills Presbyterian Church (Simpsonville) before moving overseas last Fall. He is married to Eska, and together they have four children. He is a native of Glen Burnie, Maryland.

The D. family is currently living in Malaysia with the hope of forming a team and going to Indonesia in a couple of years. They currently have tourist visas, so please pray that God would provide them a 1–2 year visa before the end of July. Eska is expecting their fifth child and she will not be able to fly at the end of July. Ask God to give them favor in the eyes of the immigration officers.

Please pray for their partnership with the Indonesian church and their recruitment of team members from the U.S. ♦



Question 130:

Why should infants be baptized?

Answer:

Because they have a sinful nature and need a Savior.

***I will make with them an everlasting covenant,
that I will not turn away from doing good to them.
And I will put the fear of me in their hearts,
that they may not turn from me. Jeremiah 32:40***

Baptism shows that God's people are members of His covenant community. What does a policeman wear or keep in his pocket to show that he is a policeman? A badge! Baptism is like a badge that says we belong to God.



Baptism is the sign of God's covenant of grace. It shows us that God promises to forgive sins and wash them away in the blood of Christ. Baptism, like a badge, marks us as part of God's covenant community, and it calls us to be true followers of Christ. ♦

from *Kids' Quest* by Great Commission Publications



at the corner of

River &
Rhett

Spring Masculine Mandate Sessions

May 24 | June 14

SPC Gymnasium @ 8:00 A.M.



There may be nothing more powerful in the lives of children than for their parents to enjoy a godly, grace-filled marriage. (p. 123)

Preparation for the Lord's Supper on May 18:

What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?

It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves, of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon Him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

From Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 97

May Birthdays



Have a Great Day!

11

Dalton Ford, Abigail Pomerlyan, Molly Szrama

12

Alice Barnett

13

Merritt Nieto, James Pratt

14

Lynda Duncan, Sarah Horn, Abigail Johnson, Gina Thomas

15

Vitor Cortial

17

Daniel Kight

This Week

MORNING SERMON

Dr. Richard D. Phillips

THE THRONE OF THE ANCIENT OF DAYS
Daniel 7:1–12

EVENING SERMON

Rev. Brendon J. Branigin

THE SPIRIT AND HIS WORK
1 Peter 1:1–2

Sunday, May 11

- 8:30 A.M. MORNING WORSHIP
- 9:55 A.M. Children's Chapel (*Sanctuary*)
- 10:00 A.M. Sunday School
- 11:00 A.M. MORNING WORSHIP
- 5:00 P.M. Finance Committee (*Conference Room*)
- 5:30 P.M. Season of Prayer (*Chapel*)
- 6:00 P.M. EVENING WORSHIP
- 7:30 P.M. Worship & Music Committee (*Conference Room*)

Monday, May 12

- 6:30 A.M. Men's Bible Study (*Fellowship Hall*)
- 6:30 P.M. Joint Diaconate and Session Meeting (*Chapel*)

Tuesday, May 13

- 10:00 A.M. WIC Circle 3 (*Fellowship Hall*)
- 1:30 P.M. WIC Circle 5 (*Fellowship Hall*)
- 7:00 P.M. WIC Circle 2 (*T. Looper Home*)
- 7:00 P.M. WIC Circle 4 (*L. Martin Home*)
- 7:00 P.M. WIC Circle 6 (*T. King Home*)

Wednesday, May 14

- 5:30 P.M. Missions Committee (*Conference Room*)
- 5:30 P.M. Graduation Banquet (*Gym*)
- 7:00 P.M. CAT Kids (Ages 3–Grade 4);
Covenant Kids (Grades 5–8)
- 6:45 P.M. Graduation Program (*Gym*)

Friday, May 16

- 12:00 P.M. Men's Luncheon and
Bible Study (*Gym*)
- 1:30 P.M. Mission to Main
- 6:00 P.M. Friday Night Alive (*Phillips Home*)

Saturday, May 17

- 7:00 P.M. English Country Dancing (*Gym*)



Upcoming Events

spcgreenville.org/calendar

May 12	Diaconate and Session Meetings
May 14	Graduation Banquet
May 21	CAT Kids Program
May 23	CAT Kids Spring Fling
May 24	Masculine Mandate
May 25	Baptism Sunday
May 28	Summer Children's Choir Begins
June 1	All Adult Summer Sunday School Begins
June 14	Masculine Mandate
June 15	Baptism Sunday
June 16-21	Sr. High Summer Conference (Pawleys Island, SC)
June 23-27	PCA General Assembly (Chattanooga, TN)
July 7-11	Vacation Bible School
July 21-25	Jr. High Summer Conference (Ridge Haven, NC)

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that the Son is the same kind of God as the God from which he comes. The phrase also communicates that the Son is not a *part* of God. He is wholly God of wholly God. The generation of the Son does not imply the division of the Godhead or the multiplication of deities.

The Son is God; the Father is God; the Son is of the Father (the Father is not of the Son); and there is only one God. The Son is "Light of Light." This claim is similar to the last, but not identical. Here we are dealing with a term rather than a title of divine identity. The argument is that if the term *light* means the same thing with both the Father and the Son, then they must both be of the same essence. The Son is not a different kind of light than the Father. To put it more technically, a property shared in common, with the same meaning in both, signifies a common nature.

The Son is not a lesser light than the Father. The Son is "very God of very God." This clause is crucial, especially with regard to the Arian controversy. The defenders of Arius might have said that the Son was God of God. They might have affirmed that Jesus Christ was God and that he came from God.

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Announcements

Baby Shower

All the women of Second Presbyterian Church are invited on Sunday, May 18 from 2–4 P.M. to the Gamble home in celebration of mom-to-be, Sarah Phillips and Baby Boy Phillips, due in August. The shower is being hosted by (mom-in-love) Sharon Phillips, Sarah's Aunts Maggie and Lynn, and dear friends. Please RSVP to Sharon Phillips. Sarah is registered at <https://my.babylist.com/sarahphillips>

CAT Kids Closing Program

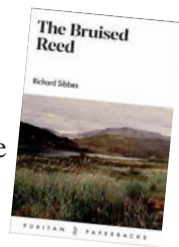
The church family is invited to this special program on Wednesday, May 21, at 7:00 P.M. in the Sanctuary. Special thanks to Jill Mann and her many helpers who work diligently throughout the year to provide meaningful teaching to our Covenant Children.

Men's Meeting, Saturday, May 24

All men (high school age and above) are invited to this important time of teaching with Pastor Richard Phillips. Enjoy breakfast together at 8:00 A.M. in the Gym followed by a lesson from Pastor Phillips' book, *The Masculine Mandate*. Books can be purchased in the church bookstore. There is no need to register and food will be provided.

All-Adult Summer Sunday School

All-Adult Sunday School begins on June 1 in the Gym. Books are available for purchase in the Church Bookstore (located in the hallway outside the Chapel) for \$8.



Date	Chapter	Chapter Title	Teacher
June 1	Intro./1	The Reed and the Bruising	VanDoodewaard
June 8	2	Christ Will Not Break the Bruised Reed	Bianchi
June 15	3/4	The Smoking Flax/ Christ Will Not Quench the Smoking Flax	Early
June 22	5	The Spirit of Mercy Should Not Move Us	Zimmerman

They might have affirmed these statements because they reckoned the Son to be a different sort of God than the Father. But the Arians would not have said that the Son is “very God,” for that implies that the Son is no less God than the Father (“very” is an archaic way of saying “truly”). The Word was God—that much was plain from John 1. But for the Arians, the divine Word was a different kind of deity (a created, lesser deity) than the Father. The Nicene Creed will not allow for an Arian misinterpretation of John’s Gospel.

The Son was “not made.” Now we come to the crux of the Nicene argument. There was no way that Arius or his party could possibly defend this assertion. For Arius, one could not be “begotten” unless he was “made” or “created.” Hence, the Nicene Creed is making the all-important affirmation that the Son’s begottenness is not like our begottenness, or not in every respect. The Son’s begottenness is an *eternal* begottenness. No one created the Son. There never was when the Son was not—not in time and not before time.

A Song to Be Sung

The doctrine of the Son’s begottenness from the Father is called eternal generation. It is a classic and crucial Trinitarian doctrine, but it also a mystery beyond human description. Eternal generation is like human generation in that one essence begets the same essence, but it is unlike human generation in that it does not involve physical reproduction. Eternal generation is hyperphysical (it is outside the physical or material realm), infinite (it does not take place in time), and ineffable (it cannot be fully comprehended). By eternal generation we do not mean that the Father created the Son’s essence, but rather that the Father *communicates* the essence he shares with the Son.

Nicene orthodoxy teaches us to hold several truths at the same time:

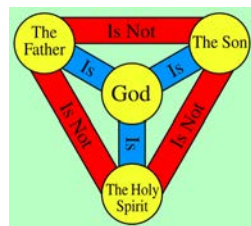
The Son is of the same essence as the Father.

The Son is to be distinguished from the Father.

The Son is of the Father.

The Father is never of the Son.

The language of “only begotten” helps explain how all these truths can stand together. The early church thought long and hard about how to explain that the Godhead can consist of multiple persons without there being multiple essences. The Son is equal with the Father because he was eternally begotten



of the Father. The Son is also distinct from the Father because he was eternally begotten from the Father. When Jesus says he is in the Father and the Father is in him, he is speaking to the theological reality that the Nicene Creed means to defend (John 14:11). We know that a son is from the “stuff” of his father, and yet a son is not the same as his father, and the father does not come from his son. What we understand intuitively in an earthly sense, the Nicene Creed is trying to explain and safeguard in an eternal and theological sense.

If you find all of this is hard to understand, you are not alone. The most brilliant theologians in history have gladly acknowledged that the doctrine of the Trinity is full of mystery. We are dealing with realities beyond our ability to fully understand or articulate. But *mysterious* does not mean unreasonable or irrational. It means that we, as finite creatures, do not possess sufficient intellect to fully grasp the infinite. When faced with such glories, it is often wise to think of how we pray and how we sing. Intuitively, led by the Spirit, full of the word, we know that Jesus Christ is to be worshiped just as the Father is to be worshiped. We know, like the earliest Christians knew, that we should sing songs about Jesus and to Jesus.

Think of what we sing at Christmas in that brilliant hymn *Adeste Fidelis* (“O Come, All Ye Faithful”): “God of God, Light of Light. / Lo, he abhors not the Virgin’s womb. / Very God, begotten, not created.” The Christ child we worship in the manger is none other than “very God of very God,” the only begotten Son who is from the Father but was not created or made by him. Many of us have been reciting Nicene theology since before we could read or write. We know it to be true. We know it to be glorious. We know it to be beautiful. And so we sing. ♦

NOTES

¹ Quoted in Donald Fairbairn and Ryan M. Reeves, *The Story of Creeds and Confessions: Tracing the Development of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 55–56.

This article is adapted from *The Nicene Creed: What You Need to Know about the Most Important Creed Ever Written* by Kevin DeYoung.

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