

The One and Only, Very Special, Precious Jesus

The Greek word translated "only begotten" in the KJV is *monogenēs*. This Greek word is made up of two parts: "mono," meaning "only," and "genos," meaning "kind". According to the Greek-English Lexicon, *monogenēs* has the primary definition of "pertaining to being the only one of its kind or class, unique in kind."

John is the only biblical writer to use the Greek word *monogenēs* in reference to Christ:

John 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the **only begotten** of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the **only begotten** Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his **only begotten** Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the **only begotten** Son of God.

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

What did John mean, and why did he choose to use this word?

As we noted, the word *monogenēs* is made up of two other words: *monos* (only) and *genos*.

genos has a range of meanings, having to do with where you come from, your family, race/nation, your kind or class. There are 21 instances of this word *genos* in the New Testament, and in not one of them is there any reference to birth. They all use *genos* to mean a kind or group of things or people.

What is the correct meaning of the word *monogenēs* that has been incorrectly translated as "only begotten"? Taking the meaning of *monos* as "only" and the meaning of *genos* as "kind" or "class" would give *monogenēs* the meaning "only one of its kind". This is the meaning that is implied in these verses.

monogenēs is found four times in the New Testament other than those that refer to Christ. In none of them is there any direct references to the birth of the individual. The emphasis is on the idea of "only" in a special way. The one other verse in which *monogenēs* is translated "only begotten" in the King James Version is Hebrews 11:17:

Hebrews 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his **only begotten** son,

Here Paul refers to Isaac as Abraham's "only begotten son". We know Abraham had more than one son, but Isaac was the special son he had by Sarah, the miracle son, the son of promise - the covenant son.

Therefore, it is the uniqueness of Isaac among the other sons that allows for the use of *monogenēs* in that context. This helps us to understand that *monogenēs* does truly mean *special, precious, unique* and that it's not primarily intended to convey the idea of birth or a literal begetting.

So where does the idea of "begetting" in the word "only begotten" come from? It comes from a group of closely related words that do have the meaning of birth, begetting, being born:

gennaō - "beget", "be born"

Matthew 1:2 Abraham **begat** Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

gennēsis - "birth"

Luke 1:14 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his **birth**.

genetē - "birth"

John 9:1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

genesia - birthday

Matthew 14:6 When Herod's **birthday** came, the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests. She pleased Herod

gennētos - "born", "begotten"

Matthew 11:11 Verily I say unto you, Among them that are **born** of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

It's important to note the fact that there are two different, but closely related families of words, one related to birth, and the other to a kind or class of people or things. *monogenēs* is related to the latter, and not to the group having to do with birth. It is unfortunate that this distinction was not always made, and *monogenēs* eventually came to mean "only begotten" when applied to Christ.

Many newer translations of the Bible do not include the word "begotten" in the translation of *monogenēs*:

John 1:14 (NIV) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the **one and only Son**, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth..

John 1:18 (NASB) No one has seen God at any time; **God the only Son**, who is in the arms of the Father, He has explained Him.

John 3:16 (ESV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his **only Son**, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:18 (NLT) There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's **one and only Son**.

1 John 4:9 (RSV) In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his **only Son** into the world, so that we might live through him.

While Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Peter used the word *agapētos* - "beloved", John was primarily concerned with demonstrating that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31), and he uses *monogenēs* to highlight Jesus as uniquely God's Son - sharing the same divine nature as God - as opposed to believers who are God's sons and daughters by adoption (Ephesians 1:5).

Matthew 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my **beloved Son**, in whom I am well pleased.

Mark 9:7 And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my **beloved Son**: hear him.

Luke 20:13 Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my **beloved son**: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.

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

It can be seen that the word *monogenēs* as applied by John to Christ gives no support to the concept that He had a beginning at some point in the remote past, for the term does not mean anything to do with a begetting or a birthing process. John chose to use *monogenēs* to bring out Jesus' "one and only" uniqueness as the incarnate Son - the God/man who became an in-the-flesh human while retaining His fully divine nature as one "equal with God" (John 5:18). Jesus is very special, very precious, the only one of His kind in the whole universe.