

Self-portraits of God

Studies in the Life and Work of Jesus

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Lesson 3 Snap-shots in Titles

General Introduction

When I was in college there was a general good time had by all, except for the time spent in one or two classes in which one felt like they might never be able to get the credit required to be allowed to graduate. Exactly which class was The One that made life uncertain depended on the course of study being pursued, generally -- except for the one or two classes that made almost everybody struggle.

One of the famous classes was a course in the fine arts which lasted all year long. Each quarter was a different topic; music, art, and literature. This means, of course, that we learned a lot about the famous places in the world, as well as the things that they were famous for -- like the flying buttresses in architecture.

Many of these buildings and objects had a religious theme and often featured famous works of art, such as the paintings on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. To this student it seemed that there were artist's ideas of the creation story, and portrayals of the life and death of Jesus, and conceptualizations of Jesus and His mother, on or in every building ever conceived during those long centuries we were learning about!

The question that seems to push itself into this lesson, as one re-lives those pictures we learned by author and location, is, why all this attention to the story of Jesus? What was He really like? Were those artist's conceptions always correct? Where in the Bible does one look for a picture of Jesus?

I heard you! You said you had already figured out that I was going to suggest to you that the answer to these questions might be hiding in the titles that Jesus used and came with;

and you are right. There seems to be a title appropriate for every facet of the story of salvation; for every picture painted. As such each title merges itself into a portrait of the activities and qualities of the one carrying that title.

Some of those titles are intriguing; titles from nature, like, The Branch, The Bright and Morning Star, the Lily of the Valley, or, the Rose of Sharon. And there are also those perhaps better known, but nebulous, descriptive titles composed of phrases such as, the Wrath of the Lamb, or, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

Of course there are also titles everybody recognizes, even if everybody does not know that Jesus was called by them. Titles like Judge, Prophet, Servant, King, Lamb, or God.

Many of the meanings carried by these titles are just about what one would assume they mean, from their general use in daily vocabulary. However there are some fascinating titles, which are very easy to pronounce, and which are very often misunderstood.

As we proceed with this study that class in the fine arts will be somewhat close to all of us, I suppose, as we try to identify the pictures that seem to want to reveal themselves as we survey the vocabulary-colors making up each title-picture; and again you have already guessed that in this study we will be reviewing those titles that are the easiest to misunderstand.

Title One: Only begotten

(Many of these thoughts were presented to us by Dr. Raoul Dederen in a class in Christology, in about 1965.)

The Story

Our study begins with the simple statement found in Matthew 3:17-- this is My Beloved Son. This phrase comes to us from the account of Jesus baptism. This record simply states that John was preaching about the One coming after him who was greater than himself; this One would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire, John said.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him.

And John tried to prevent Him saying, I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?

But Jesus answered and said to him, Permit it to be so now for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he allowed Him.

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.

And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, this is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Setting and Analysis of the Story

This is My Beloved Son. This title is so clear that it would need neither comment nor explanation, except that this title, son, appears in one of the best-known verses of Scripture with an alteration. As you probably know John 3:16 tells us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Now we have an interesting issue -- why does God's beloved Son become His only-begotten Son when the promise is that faith in Him brings everlasting life? What is the meaning of the phrase only-begotten? What does this phrase add to the concept beloved?

The phrase only-begotten is a translation of the Greek word monogenes. Yes, you are going to have to learn this word! This word appears in the Greek New Testament nine times; five of those times it is applied to Jesus. This is a most fascinating concept.

Meanings of Monogenes, when applied to others then Jesus

In Luke 7: 11-15 we read about a dead man being carried out of the city of Nain by a large group of people at the same time that Jesus and a large group of people were entering the city. When Jesus saw the weeping-widow mother walking behind the people carrying her son's body He had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep. Then He came and touched the open coffin and those who carried him stood still, and He said, Young man, I say to you arise! And the young man sat up and began to talk. And Jesus presented him to his mother.

The relevance to our study of this story is in the description of the young man Luke gives to us; the only son of his mother and she was a widow. The only-son phrase appearing in Luke's Gospel is a translation of the word monogenes. By this story we find our first definition of the word monogenes; the only one, irreplaceable. The father has died and there are no other children. And because the mother is a widow, he is also the needed one. The dictionary meaning of monogenes is, in general, the same;

mono, meaning one; and genes, from ginomai, meaning come to be. The dictionary meaning is one-of-a-kind.

In Luke 8:42, Jairus' daughter is a monogenes daughter. This father may have had sons, but this was an only daughter.

Luke 9:38 adds to our study when we read there of a man calling to Jesus from a crowd, asking Jesus to look at the son of him, because, "he is monogenes to me." This boy has had many bad experiences, and Jesus heals the boy, but the reason that he is monogenes is not given. This story simply tells us that to the father he is monogenes.

Summary

One irreplaceable son, the needed one, an only daughter, and an unknown quality, so far make up the meaning of monogenes.

Hebrews 11:17. By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son.

In the experience in Abraham's life referred to in the Hebrew's text the offered-up-son Isaac is not put to death and resurrected. Rather it is the faith of Abraham that trusted God to the point of being willing to obey the clear command of God to offer up the son through whom the promises of a future family were to be fulfilled that is credited with the faith which obeys God's expressed will. According to this faith the son was offered up, but the faith of the father does not make Isaac a monogenes.

Isaac is not only the son of his father (you already knew that!) but he is also the son of his mother, being born after she was expected to be able to have children, according to the promise of God to her. This makes him a monogenes. Of course Abraham, Isaac's father, was also old when he was born, but after the death of Sarah, Isaac's mother, Abraham had other children by his second wife.

To see Isaac's monogenes title coming from the fact of the age of his mother is of course adequate reason for him to be called monogenes. But there is much more to the story of Isaac! Being the son of a promise also qualifies him for the monogenes title, but there is more! Isaac was the son through whom the promised Messiah was to find His genetic family roots. Isaac's descendants became the tribes of Israel. Isaac is not only the promised son, he is the son through whom the promises made by God to Abraham were to find fulfillment.

The Portrait

In the New Testament, when the word Monogenes is not applied to Jesus, the picture we are presented with is drawn by association; the portrait is of a divinely provided irreplaceable channel of blessing.

Meanings of Monogenes when applied to Jesus

The first occurrence of this word when it is applied to Jesus is found in

John 1:14. And the Word became 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.

This passage parallels the story of the boy; the significance of the monogenes title is not clear; unless it is that He is full of grace and truth. The implied message in the English language is that He was fathered by God; but that is not the meaning of monogenes. The concept of becoming a parent is not part of this word. That element comes shortly! With another title!

John 1:18. No one has seen God at anytime, the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

In this passage we have a great definition for the significance of monogenes. Here we are told that the One who knows God perfectly has set forth in language the One no man has ever seen. This means that the monogenes is the revealer of the unseen One; the accurate representative of the father.

1 John 4:9. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son Into the world, that we might live through Him.

Here the message is easy to see-the sent from God, the monogenes Son, is the One through whom eternal life is brought within our reach.

John 3: 16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

In this verse the Only Begotten (monogenes) grants everlasting life to all who believe in Him.

John 3:18. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

The very interesting question this text presents to us is in regard to its reference to the name of the Son of God.

This chapter, chapter three, starts with the statement that there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

This man came to Jesus by night. (The one called Son of God in verse 18.)

This name, Jesus, is the name that the angel instructed Joseph he was to call the son to be born to Mary, because, he said, He will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1: 21).

Therefore the significance of monogenes in John 3:18, where it is connected to the title Son of God, and both are applied to Jesus, is that this monogenes is the One who, if believed in, removes the condemnation which attaches to those born in the world, and saves His people, those believing in His name, for the everlasting life promised in the preceding verse, John 3: 16.

Summary

When Jesus is called the monogenes, translated the only begotten, there is no reference to anyone being fathered.

There are several messages carried by the title as it is attached to Jesus. He as the monogenes is full of grace and truth, the accurate representative of the unseen Father, sent by Him, to bring everlasting life within the reach of those who believe in Him. This means that by extension, Jesus is the needed one; a meaning of monogenes that we found being carried by this word earlier.

He is also the remover of the condemnation which attaches to all born in this world. Jesus, the only begotten, with whom none of His people perishes.

Here we see that the meaning of monogenes, though painted with different colors than in our earlier texts, has the same significance-- a divinely provided irreplaceable channel of blessing.

MONOGENES-one kind of Gift; the only one you cannot live without.

The Portrait

This self-portrait is a double exposure- covering a profile of Jesus we see the glory of the Father.

Title Two- Firstborn

My brother is older than I am; you already know! He was born first! Abraham Lincoln was born before George Bush-- a long time! You already said it! Abraham Lincoln was born first! The firstborn was born first! I agree. So why are we starting a study of this word? Notice Hebrews 1: 5, 6.

For to which of the angels did He ever say: You are My Son, today I have begotten you?

And again:

I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son?

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

Let all the angels of God worship Him.

What is the significance of Jesus being called the firstborn in Scripture?

Luke 2:7. And she brought forth her firstborn son. In the Greek word order-- and she bore the son of her, the firstborn.

Hebrews 11: 28. By faith, he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

This text of course comes from the story of the deliverance of the twelve tribes of the Israelites from being slaves in Egypt. On the night of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt all who were born first and were not in a marked house died.

In these two texts when someone, including Jesus, is called the firstborn, the word means born first.

Revelation 1: 5. This text reads in part, Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead.

Now we have a problem! In the Old Testament, there are accounts of a number of miracles, including stories of people being resurrected from the dead. Therefore the title firstborn cannot mean born first when Jesus is called the firstborn from the dead.

We have also noticed that Joseph had two sons; the oldest being Manasseh, the younger being Ephraim (Genesis 48:17, 18). However in Jeremiah 31:9 the Lord says Ephraim is My firstborn.

Now we have the exciting question put in front of us; if firstborn sometimes does not mean born first, what is the significance of the title, firstborn? Remember Hebrews 12:23 tells us there is a church of the firstborn in Heaven.

To look for the significance of this title in those occurrences where it does not seem to refer to being born first, we will examine some more texts in the Bible where this title appears.

Genesis 43: 33. This text comes to us from the story of Joseph seating his brothers to eat with him. In part it reads,

And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth.

We should have many such texts! The firstborn title refers to the receiving of the birthright when it does not mean born first.

Notice the following passage. Psalm 89: 20-28.

I have found My servant David; with my holy oil, I have anointed him, with whom My hand shall be established; also My arm shall strengthen him.

The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him.

I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague those who hate him. But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted. Also I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers. He shall cry to Me, You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him.

In this passage we see set forth some of the blessings that were part of receiving the birthright. This generally went to the one born first. But in this passage, as in others we noted, the blessing of the birthright did not go to the one born first; David was the youngest of the sons of Jesse (1 Samuel 16:10-12), but he is here made firstborn by the Lord.

When Hebrews 12: 23 speaks of the General assembly and church of the firstborn, who are registered in Heaven we now know that all who will belong to the Kingdom of Heaven will be participants in the blessings that are tied to the title Firstborn.

The richness of the blessings that come with the title firstborn is seen when we read about Jesus that He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for by Him all things were created.

The Portrait

here is of all the Gold-Metal wearers; Him who made what God has, and is therefore the firstborn of all creation, and those God made to be His firstborn, sharers of His title Firstborn.

Title Three: I have begotten you

Introduction

It is said of Jesus, in Him was Life, original, unborrowed, underived. If this is true, then what does the phrase, "I have begotten you", mean, when it is applied to Jesus? Does it not mean, "I have fathered you."? Or, does it have some hidden meaning like the phrase only-begotten? What is the message which this title-portrait carries, or, to ask the question a different way, when the picture was taken, what was the subject the camera was aimed that? What is the picture taken of?

First -- yes, this phrase is accurately translated, and, yes, this phrase means I have fathered you. But is Jesus not one of the members of the Godhead? Yes, again!

Notice John chapter one.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God (John 1: 1, 2).

Proverbs adds to our thinking, as One brought up with Him! (See chapter 8, verse 30—Hebrew; minion) Sooo! What does this title reveal as a self-portrait of God?!

This title is one of the fascinating studies found in Scripture. You will enjoy this concept, and maybe be a little surprised at the picture it presents, if you do not already know.

The Story

In the New Testament book titled Hebrews we are reading along about priests and the duties they were expected to be responsible for, and how one became a priest, and that no one made himself a priest, when the writer suddenly records that God said,

"You are My Son, Today I Have Begotten You."

The question that immediately jumps out at us is, what day is today? On what day was the Son begotten?

The first thing that comes to mind in order to start to find an answer to this question is to look in the margin of the Bible to see if there is a reference to another passage where this concept appears; there is-- Psalm 2: 7.

This Psalm is a story passage, told by a third person, who is telling about a conversation as it is observed; and at the same time, the third person comments on the activities being observed, and also participates in the dialog. This section of verses, or paragraph, develops something like this:

COMMENTATOR'S COMMENTS

Why do the nation's rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth and their rulers set themselves and take counsel together against the Lord and

against His anointed (One chosen by or as if by divine election; Webster), saying, let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; that Lord shall hold them in derision.

Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:

(COMMENTATOR'S REPORT of what the Lord actually said He did in response to the conflict over His anointed is recorded in the next verses.)

Yet have I set My king on My holy hill of Zion. (The anointed was made King by God in spite of the objections.)

COMMENTATOR'S QUESTION TO THE NEW KING -- What was that document the Lord gave to you at your enthronement, and what did He say to you?

NEW KINGS REPLY TO THE COMMENTATOR'S QUESTION

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.

Now we have the answer to the question about what day "today" is, the day on which the Lord said, Today I have begotten You; it is the enthronement day, the day that the One divinely appointed to be king became king.

I heard your question. If the Lord could say to the new king, Today I have begotten You, on the day of His enthronement, could He not also say to Him, I have begotten You, on the day of another great event, such as the day of His resurrection, or the day that He became High Priest, if the Lord was the One bringing about all of those acts?

Another text! Paul was preaching about what God has said He would do for those who believe and respond to His promises, when he said (See Acts 13:33),

and we declare to you glad tidings-- that promise which was made to the fathers-- God has filled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

You are My Son, Today I Have Begotten You.

In the second Psalm, the day the king was begotten was the day of his becoming king; but here in Acts chapter 13 the day that Jesus was begotten was the day of His resurrection.

One more text. Hebrews 5: 5.

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was Him who said to Him: You are My Son, Today I Have Begotten You.

Summary

The phrase translated I have begotten you is a phrase that means I have begotten you, I have fathered you; I have caused you to become. Exactly what it is one has become has to be determined by the work one has been begotten to do. But it is always a work that is tied to one's being a son. (Don't forget that girls are brothers in Deuteronomy!) "Today" refers to the time the action is taken.

The Portrait

This title is applied to the One begotten by the Father to be King, Priest, and Savior. Whereas this work involves making peace between the Father and those who fear, hate, or misunderstand Him, this picture is of the One who is the Father's comrade (Hebrew-- see Zachariah 13: 7)-- the Father's Twin.

Title Four: The Lamb

As this study on the meaning of some of the titles associated with the work and person of Jesus has progressed it has begun to become clear that all the titles that Jesus carried, or that were predicted about Him, are each proleptic portraits of a work, or facet of His mission, or a revelation of a character quality, that He would be found to have as the life He lived came to view before those who were observing Him.

No one of these titles is adequate to portray the entire story of Jesus, unless it is the title Lamb, as it appears in the Gospels, or the first four books of the New Testament, and in the last book of the New Testament, The Revelation.

This title sometimes seems to have gathered under itself the entirety of the person and work of Jesus. The significance of the title is twofold; one facet being the very obvious, and the other being one of the most surprising! You may be delighted, and surprised, when you see what is hiding in the shadows of this picture!

Now to

The Story

In the beginning of that story which reaches from the first chapter of the Bible to the last verse, we read of the creation of the earth, and the garden where the people lived, until they needed for Jesus to come and bail them out of trouble. One of the first details we learn about the way back to oneness with God, after the trouble in the garden, comes from the fact that the One coming to restore unity was to be represented by a Lamb. This vocabulary word, Lamb, is found through all the time-line of the Biblical story.

The concept lamb is central to all facets of the biblical story. Throughout the entirety of the Old Testament the worship of God, after the trouble in the garden, involves in one dimension, or another, the concept lamb, starting of course with the first book in the Bible, Genesis.

When we start to read the New Testament we do not read very many verses before we find John the Baptizer, at the very beginning of the New Testament portion of the Biblical story, preaching to the people, down by the river, about the Lamb of God.

The obvious question is, what is the significance of the title Lamb when it is applied to Jesus by John as he preaches by the river?

Lamb appears in the Old Testament about 81 times. About 75 of those times the context is sacrifice and suffering. The other references are to clothes, flocks, or people. This Greek word is Amnos.

This means that when John the Baptist called Jesus the amnos Lamb of God in John 1:29 and 36, his hearers learned that the future, for Jesus, would include suffering as part of His work. Throughout the Old Testament lambs were offered in sacrifice. By this title Jesus was designated to do the work symbolically accomplished by the sacrificial Lamb.

But this is only part of the story of the Lamb!

When we start to read in the book of Revelation, written by the same person who wrote the Gospel of John to which we have just been referring, we find that the book of Revelation also has a story about a lamb near it's start; but the word for lamb in the Revelation is a different Greek word than the Greek word for lamb appearing in John's Gospel. Here the Greek word for Lamb is arnion—not the word amnos which we saw earlier.

In the Story in the Revelation there is a problem about the opening of a sealed document, a scene which John is watching, when the solution to the issue is found to be

a figure which appears to John as a lamb having been slain, only to have the figure be called the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!! Now we have a surprising development! The lamb having been slain is now also the Lion

The symbol of a lamb having been slain is of course a portrayal of the work Jesus has already accomplished thus far as the Amnos Lamb, a concept that is not a surprise because of all the allusions to it in the Old Testament and in the early portions of the New Testament. But in all those appearances of the Lamb concept there was no indication that the suffering Lamb would become a Lion! There are a few allusions to a Lion work in the Old Testament, but they are not prominent.

With this portrayal of Jesus as the Amnos Lamb we have a new pattern of activity portrayed for the one carrying the lamb title. The future portrayed for Jesus by this now dual symbol will not only include a work associated with suffering, the Amnos side of the symbol, but it will also include those types of activities associated with a Lion!

Snapshots of the Work and Character of Jesus as the Lion-Lamb

In the Old Testament (the LXX) the word amnos for lamb occurs only four-times; none of those occurrences are references to a real lamb. Rather the word refers to a lamb-like quality.

The word-pictures for this title range from a description of the hills skipping like lambs, because of the presence of the Lord (Psalm. 114: 4, 6), to a portrayal of God's kindness toward His people, which is described as His gathering the lambs and carrying them gently (Isaiah 40: 11).

In the Revelation, where the lamb title appears 28 times, the variety of pictures is even wider; the Lion having now become an actor under this symbol, alongside the expected qualities, those associated with the Lamb.

In the Revelation Chapter 7, Jesus as the Lamb leads and provides, along with God, for the redeemed in heaven.

In Chapter 13, the Lamb is the Pattern,

While in Chapter 15 the Lamb shares the title Lord God Almighty. The message here is that the Lion that became a Lamb and was subsequently slain is not only the Redeemer of His people, but is worthy of the title Lord God Almighty.

Finally, in Chapter 19 the Lamb is shown to be the sum total of all the attributes we have discovered Him to be in our study. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Lamb (Amnos) of God, the Lord God Almighty, drawn into one -- because He has accepted the responsibilities of being a husband to the redeemed; the Provider of her home. The fulfillment of this responsibility is that which necessitated all the work He has done before. The figure of marriage in this chapter shows the intimate and indissoluble nature of His work.

The references to the Anion-Lamb acting as a Lion are of such a nature as to imply that the use of power in association with the working out of salvation for those who are to be living in the Lord's house is reserved for the Lord alone (see Revelation 12). Those who are His do all their gaining of victories with only the Amnos-Lamb portion of the Arnion-Lamb symbol.

The significance of the Lamb title is that the influence and work of Jesus is never-ending, and without borders.

The result of the Arnion-Lamb's work in the atmosphere of His people is such as to guarantee that their horizons are eternally being pushed out.

The Self-Portrait

Under the lamb title in the Scriptures, we find a collage; the pictures are of a very gentle Lamb, and of a powerful Lion.

Titles as Mirrors

The Only-begotten, Monogenes, literally meaning one-of-a-kind, the unique one, when applied to Jesus, means that there will never be another Jesus, the One who saves from Sin. This One is our only Savior; the only Savior.

The title Firstborn tells us Jesus is not only important to us, but that he is very important to the Father, the One who loves us enough to send a Helper, of whom none is greater. This title shows that the Father would not have it said that He could have done more. It is sometimes said that in giving Jesus, the Father gave all heaven; that the title Firstborn means that the Son of God was given to the human race, for ever to be our brother, while sharing the throne of the universe; The Firstborn of all creation, God's First Choice.

I have begotten you reminds us that all of the blessings we have come out of the love of the Father. He is the first cause of all our good, all our blessings; the Provider of all our needs; the One who knows us as only a Maker can.

In

The Mirror

which is the titles of Jesus we see reflected The Trusted One who can.

