

# G L O S S A

## The Two Begettings of Christ

**T**he Scriptures marvelously reveal the two becomings of Christ. John 1:14 speaks of the Word becoming flesh, and 1 Corinthians 15:45 speaks of the last Adam becoming a life-giving Spirit. These two becomings, however, closely parallel the two begettings<sup>1</sup> of Christ. Matthew 1:20 speaks of Christ being begotten of the Holy Spirit, and Acts 13:33<sup>2</sup> speaks of Christ being begotten on the day of resurrection. In both His becoming and His begetting, the processes of the all-inclusive Christ are revealed.

The Greek word translated “begetting” or “begotten” in these verses is *gennaō*. Although *gennaō* refers primarily to the begetting of a father, it also refers to the result of the process, to the bearing or to the bringing forth in birth (of the mother). It is the root of the word *origin* or *generation* (Gk. *genesis*) in Matthew 1:1 and 18. *Gennaō* is used in the genealogy of Christ, where it refers to the begetting of the forefathers of Jesus. It is used in the passive voice especially when the agent is not stressed (such as Matthew 2:1, “Jesus was *born* in Bethlehem”). It is used twice in Matthew 1 in the passive voice with the preposition *ek* to indicate the source of the begetting/birth of Jesus. Jesus was begotten of (*ek*) the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20; cf. Luke 1:35), referring to the source of His divine nature, and He was born of (*ek*) Mary (Matt. 1:16), referring to the source of His human nature. In its latter use its meaning closely follows another Greek word usually translated “bear” or “give birth”—*tiktō*, which occurs three times in Matthew 1 in reference to Mary bearing or giving birth to Jesus (vv. 21, 23, 25).

In Matthew 1:20 and in Luke 1:35 the use of *gennaō* refers to the begetting of the divine nature at the time of the human conception of Jesus. Although the NASB and the NRSV translate *gennaō* as “conceived,” in Matthew 1:20 it is better translated as “begotten” or “born.” This was more than just a human conception because of the involvement of the divine nature. This verse refers to the time of the human conception of Jesus, but more than just a miraculous human conception took place at this time; it was the begetting of divinity in humanity. The Triune God was begotten, or born, into humanity at the time of Jesus’ human conception. The complete God was present from the time of His human conception. If Matthew had considered this as just an ordinary conception, he would probably have used the word *sullambanō* (cf. Luke 1:31).

The conception of Jesus was a twofold miracle. Through the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit, He was conceived of a human virgin and thus fully joined to humanity with the element of human nature. He was a genuine human being who partook of blood and flesh (Heb. 2:14), was made like us in all things (v. 17), and in His human life was even tempted in all respects like us, yet without sin (4:15). Even more miraculous than the divine instrumentality of His human conception was the fact that the divine element itself was begotten, or born, into Him; divinity was begotten in the humanity of Jesus. The divine nature and essence of God the Father were generated by (out of—*ek*) the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb to conceive the Lord Jesus. The entire Triune God was involved. The Son was incarnated with the Father and by the Spirit. From the beginning of His human conception and throughout all the stages of His human living, the complete God was present and joined to the humanity of Jesus. Thus, He is both the complete God and a perfect man. He possesses two natures, which were mingled together from the time of His conception to produce one person, the God-man Jesus. He is the product of divine birth and human conception. As a result, He is called both the Son of God and the Son of Man.

**T**he church fathers struggled to define the relationship between the divine and human in Jesus. The Symbol of Chalcedon attempted to define what was produced in the begetting of Jesus, acknowledging

...two natures without confusion, without change [i.e., no third essence was produced], without division, without separation, the difference between the natures by no means removed because of the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and coming [running] together into one person and one hypostasis, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same only begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.

Perhaps due to the monophysite and monothelite controversies that followed the Chalcedonian settlement, theology has tended to stress the distinction between the two natures more than the unity of the one person. However, the biblical account of the life of Jesus as presented in the four Gospels places greater emphasis on the one person who is the union/mingling<sup>3</sup> of the two natures.

This person was not a Eutychian *tertiam quid*, a third entity, but one who has all the capabilities of both natures. He was born, He had a human genealogy, He wept, He became tired, He was hungry and thirsty, and He died after thirty-three and a half years. In addition to being subject to the limitations of His human nature, He was also capable of doing what God can do, for He had all the capabilities of the Divine Being. He could forgive sins, heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead. He expressed God, living a life in fellowship with the Father, and those who saw Him saw the Father (John 14:9). Although the church fathers were very careful about assigning human experiences (such as suffering and mortality) to the Divine Being, the biblical account does not distinguish this so clearly. There are statements concerning God's own blood (Acts 20:28) and the Lord of glory being crucified (1 Cor. 2:8), and it is acceptable to echo the words of Charles Wesley, "The Immortal dies." On the other hand, the Jewish religionists were very concerned about assigning what is divine to the man Jesus. They condemned Him for saying that He, as the Son of Man, had authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:7, 10), for referring to God as His Father, thus making Himself equal with God (John 5:18), and for saying that He and the Father were one (10:30). They considered this to be a blasphemy worthy of stoning, since He, being a man, was making Himself God (vv. 33, 39). Through Christ's first begetting, divinity was begotten in humanity, God became man, immortality put on mortality, and the divine and human natures were united and mingled together in one person.

Acts 13:33 speaks of Christ's second begetting, which took place at the time of His resurrection. Dupont underscores the distinctive impact of resurrection by contrasting it with the distinctive impact of incarnation:

The humanity of Jesus is not the end of the eternal divine generation. However, by assuming it, the Word introduces it into the relationship of filiation through which it takes its origin in the Father. The humanity of Christ is introduced into this relationship at the time of the Incarnation, for, from that moment on, it only subsists through the second Person of the Trinity. But insofar as humanity, body and soul, sensitivity, intelligence and will, all that in which Jesus was really man with men, this humanity completely enters into the privileges of the divine Person only at the time of resurrection. It is

only then that the divine filiation is fully gained for it. (542-543)

He refers to the tractate on Psalm 2 by Hilary of Poitiers:

He explains that, if there is some question in the resurrection of Christ of a divine generation and of a divine filiation, this is only as regards the humanity of the Son of God. The Word possessed the divine filiation, but the assumed humanity had not yet been raised up to the enjoyment of the privileges of this filiation. In this sense, Christ, before His resurrection was not yet totally in the divine sphere. He had to, insofar as man, "be born" to the glory which He eternally possessed as Son of God. (541)

Through the resurrection of Jesus, His humanity was generated, or begotten, in divinity: Man became God; His humanity became divine; His mortal humanity put on immortality. This was the begetting, or the birth, of His humanity as the Son of God at the time of His resurrection. The human nature which had come out of the seed of David according to the flesh was designated the Son of God in power out of the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1:3-4). This begetting was not a mere "adoption" but a bringing into existence, a producing, of a new kind of humanity. The word *beget* stresses a beginning of existence, but Christ's humanity, which was begotten in resurrection, clearly had been in

existence since incarnation. Through resurrection, therefore, His humanity must have entered into a new realm of existence. The humanity that He received at incarnation must have changed to some degree. "By resurrection His human nature was sanctified, uplifted, and transformed" (Lee 23). This indicates that through resurrection a deified humanity was produced and marked the beginning of a new era, or epoch, a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

Due to the wording of the Symbol of Chalcedon, there has been some reluctance to use the word *change* in reference to Christ. According to the Bible, however, His humanity was changed but not in the sense that was condemned by the Symbol of Chalcedon.<sup>4</sup> The Bible reveals this change in His humanity (prior to and at the time of His resurrection) through the use of specific words.<sup>5</sup> His physical body was transfigured (Matt. 17:2), and after He passed through death and resurrection, He entered into glory. His body was glorified, becoming a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44) with which

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He was able to walk through closed doors and yet could still be touched by human hands (John 20:26-27; Luke 24:36-43). Because in resurrection His humanity became saturated with the divine element, the way was opened for redeemed humanity to partake of the divine nature.

This second begetting also inaugurated His heavenly ministry with His dual status as King and Priest. This fulfilled Psalm 2:7, which says, "I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: / He said to Me, 'Thou art My Son, / Today I have begotten Thee.'" This verse is quoted in both Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. Hebrews 1:3-8 relates His begetting to His kingship. He is sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on High; as the coming King He is the Firstborn; and in His uplifted, deified humanity His throne is forever and ever. Hebrews 5:5-6 relates His begetting to His being a High Priest according to the order of Melchisedec. As such a kingly Priest, He is the source of eternal salvation (v. 9).

Through His second begetting He also became the Firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18) and the Firstborn among many brothers (Rom. 8:29). Not only was His resurrection His begetting—it was also the begetting of His many brothers. According to 1 Peter 1:3 the believers in Christ were regenerated through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Dupont says:

The death on the cross did not complete our salvation. Christ still had to enter into His glory so that we would be able to have access there after Him. It was necessary that His humanity fully enter into the divine sphere so that salvation might come down upon men from God and from this glorified humanity. (543)

The two begettings of Christ, like the two becomings of Christ, may be regarded as the fulfillment of Athanasius's statement, "He was made man so that we might be made God." Divinity was begotten in humanity so that His humanity could be begotten in divinity through His resurrection. In resurrection He became the Firstborn from the dead and the Firstborn among many brothers, and as such He was the means for the believers to become regenerated as the many brothers of Christ. Through His deified humanity these brothers of Christ and sons of God have the way for their humanity to become deified humanity. He became like us (Heb. 2:17) so that we might become like Him (1 John 3:2). However, the crucial distinction between Creator and creature is preserved. We become God in life and nature but not in His Godhead. He alone is God hypostatically, not just God in life and nature. With His humanity, which has been knit into the Godhead, He, as the very God, is the object of worship, and His humanity is the means for us to receive the eternal, incorruptible, immortal life of God (John 6:51, 53-55). Therefore, the

two begettings of Christ fully open the way for us, the believers in Christ, to be begotten of God and to be brought into God.

by Roger Good

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This does not include the eternal begetting of the only begotten Son of the Father, which only relates to His divinity without the involvement of human nature.

<sup>2</sup>The latter is a quotation of Psalm 2:7 which is also quoted in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5.

<sup>3</sup>In formulating the Symbol of Chalcedon, the church fathers were very careful in the choice of words. They avoided words which were used in the Greek Bible that could in any positive sense refer to Christ. The word "without confusion" is *asygchytōs*, which means "not confounded, confused, or mixed," coming from a word *sygcheō*, which literally means, "pour together (of liquids), commingle, confound." The word *mingling* reflects the word used in the type of the meal offering (Lev. 2:4), where fine flour is mingled with oil—a solid and a liquid are combined but with the distinct natures of the two substances still preserved. We believe that this is the best word to describe the relationship between the divine and human natures in Christ. Another word that was used by the fathers was *perichōrēsis* (Gk.), or *circumcessio* (Lat.), referring to the coinherence, or interpenetration, of the divine and human natures in Christ. See also "Mingling—Was There Ever a Better Word?" *A & C*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 31, 62.

<sup>4</sup>The Chalcedonian Symbol was also careful in its use of the word translated "without change" (*atreptōs*). *Atreptōs* means "not changing, unmoved, inflexible, irreparable or *not treptōs*." *Treptōs* means "to turn, convert, twist, pervert," and even "mutate" into a third substance in which the original constituents are no longer recognizable or have lost their original characteristics or qualities.

<sup>5</sup>Transfiguration (*metaschematizō*), glorification, and having a spiritual body all imply a change. The believers also undergo change in the sense of sanctification, transformation (*metamorphosis*), and conformation after which they will also be transfigured and glorified, their body becoming a spiritual body. The use of the prepositional prefix *meta* in the Greek words translated "transfigure" and "transform" indicates change just as it does with the prefix *trans* in English.

## Works Cited

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