

Understanding the begotten concept

By Terry Hill

The purpose of this study

This article is written with the intent of refuting the growing belief amongst some non-trinitarian Seventh-day Adventists that Christ, because He is begotten of God, is not God. It also serves to show that what the SDA Church is teaching today – that the Father and the Son are only role-playing their different parts (which cannot be supported from Scripture or the writings of Ellen White) – is denying Christ His true relationship to His Father. This basic misunderstanding concerns the begotten concept. In this study we shall be exploring this concept

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Christ, the only begotten of God

The Bible makes it very clear that Christ is begotten of God (John 1:14, 18, 3:16, 3:18, 1 John 4:9). This is why He is truly the Son of God. What does it mean though to be begotten of God, and what does it mean to be the Son of God? Does it mean that Christ is not God, or that He is someone less than God?

Throughout the entire time of Ellen White's ministry, also for decades beyond, the standard belief amongst Seventh-day Adventists was that Christ is truly the Son of God. It was believed and taught that prior to anything being created, He was begotten of God. This belief was published throughout the entire spectrum of their publications. These publications included standard periodicals such as the Review and Herald, Signs of the Times and The Youth's Instructor etc. It was also published in Sabbath School lesson quarterlies and denominational books. This view portrayed, also emphasised, a non-trinitarian view of the Godhead. Never once did Ellen White say that this begotten belief was error. In fact as we shall see later, she said it was a correct understanding of Christ's pre-existence.

In 2002, the Seventh-day Adventist Church published a book called *The Trinity*. Its purpose, according to its authors, was to explain how, why and when, the Seventh-day Adventist Church changed its denominational theology from non-trinitarianism to trinitarianism (which was officially adopted at the Dallas General Conference session in 1980). In this book, Jerry Moon, one of its three co-authors, wrote the following

“Uriah Smith's *Looking Unto Jesus* was the most comprehensive and carefully nuanced exposition of the non-trinitarian view among Adventists.” (Jerry Moon, *The Trinity*, chapter 13 *Trinity and Anti-trinitarianism in Seventh-day Adventist History* page 196, 2002)

Uriah Smith (1832-1903) was one of Seventh-day Adventist's most well known pioneers. He was very highly respected. At the age of 23 in 1855, he became editor of the Review and Herald. For the majority of his life hereon, he was either its editor or associate editor. He was its editor in 1903 when he died. He was also a very good friend of Ellen White.

Smith's book, *Looking Unto Jesus*, was given voluminous advertising. It also received accolade after accolade – all of which would be far too much to quote here. I will though offer a sampling. As can be seen, it was a very highly rated work.

“THIS is the title of a new and interesting book soon to appear, from the pen of Uriah Smith. It aims to present, at one view, the holy nature, the exalted position, and the supreme work of Christ, as the Creator and Redeemer of this world. A correct view of the position and work of Christ as Redeemer being of paramount importance now, this volume gives special attention to his priesthood and the types and shadows and ceremonies by which this was foreshadowed, from creation to the cross.” (*Review and Herald* May 10th 1898)

“This work, as its title indicates, considers the theme of themes, - our Saviour and Redeemer, the hope and source of everlasting life. Christ is regarded from every Scriptural point of view, - as present in creation, redemption and the final judgment, and as he is unfolded in history and prophecy from Genesis to Revelation. The volume is interesting as showing how completely the divine Son of God and his transcendent work have filled the Sacred Story, and in this way will furnish no small degree of aid to students of the Bible.” (*Review and Herald* Sept 20th 1898)

“The object of the author of this volume is to present Christ to the world in his supreme divinity, over against the view that he is a created being with all human (im)perfections, but not "God over all, blessed forever." He draws his views and conclusions entirely from the Sacred Scriptures; and he considers first in order Christ is Creator and Redeemer, his incarnation and atonement, his priesthood, and the lesson of the cross. He explains the symbolism of the sacrificial system, of the temple and the sanctuary service and the new covenant.” (*Review and Herald, November 8th 1898 'Looking unto Jesus'*)

“This is the title of a book which is a credit in every way, to both the author and the publishers. Without a copy of this book your library will be incomplete. It presents to the reader the holy nature, the exalted position, and supreme work of Christ as the Creator and Redeemer of this world.... No book now before the religious world, presents so clear and comprehensive a view in so small a compass, of both the philosophy and modus operandi of that mystery of mysteries, the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but bare everlasting life.” (*Review and Herald August 9th 1898*)

So what had Smith written in his book that according to Jerry Moon had so perfectly summed up the non-trinitarian beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists? On page 10 we read the following

“God alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be, -- a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity, -- appeared the Word. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1. This uncreated Word was the Being, who, in the fulness of time, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. His beginning was not like that of any other being in the universe. It is set forth in the mysterious expressions, "his [God's] only begotten Son" (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), "the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14), and, "I proceeded forth and came from God." John 8:42. Thus it appears that by some divine impulse or process, not creation, known only to Omniscience, and possible only to Omnipotence, the Son of God appeared.” (*Uriah Smith, Looking Unto Jesus, Chapter 2, Christ as Creator, page 10, 1898*)

In 1898 when Uriah Smith's book was published, the above was the accepted faith of Seventh-day Adventists. This was the same year as Ellen White's *Desire of Ages* was published. This same faith, 38 years later in 1936, was declared to be, by the General Conference, the official faith of Seventh-day Adventists. You can read about this here

The 1936 Sabbath School studies

Smith then explained (this was after a lengthy explanation about Christ creating all things, also after making absolutely sure that his readers did not conclude he was saying that Christ Himself was a created being)

“With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased. All else, of things animate or inanimate, has come in by creation of the Father and the Son — the Father the antecedent cause, the Son the acting agent through whom all has been wrought. No ranks of intelligences, it matters not how high, above or below; no orders of cherubim or seraphim; no radiant thrones or extensive dominions, principalities, or powers, but were created by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (*Ibid page 13*)

Smith speaks of the evolution of “deity”. So what does this mean?

Evolution involves a process of development. Here it is said that “deity” evolved (developed). Note though that Smith said that with the Son, the evolving of “deity, **as deity, ceased**”. The reason why he said “**as deity**”, is because this developing of deity did not end with the begetting of the Son from deity. The Son eventually became (evolved into) a human being (John 1:14). Thus it can be said that God became man. This is why the Bible tells us that Jesus is God with us (Matthew 1:23, John 1:1, 14). He is God, in the person of the Son.

There are many statements made by Ellen White saying that Christ is God. You will find a cross section of them here

[EGW_Christ_is_God](#)

Notice too that Smith referred to this begetting process as “**some divine impulse or process, not creation, known only to Omniscience, and possible only to Omnipotence**”. This is very true. There is nothing in Scripture that offers any explanation as to *how* Christ was begotten. It simply says He is begotten. To us therefore, this actual process of begetting remains a mystery.

Note that Smith made very clear that this begetting (bringing forth) was not an act of creation. This is very important to keep in mind.

In 1895, which was 3 years before Smith’s book was published, Ellen White, in keeping with what Smith had written, explained

“A complete offering has been made; for “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son,”-- **not a son by creation, as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as is the forgiven sinner, but a Son begotten in the express image of the Father’s person, and in all the brightness of his majesty and glory, one equal with God in authority, dignity, and divine perfection.** In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” (*Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, 30th May 1895, ‘Christ our complete salvation’*)

She also wrote 6 weeks later (again in keeping with what was taught then by SDA’s)

“The Eternal Father, the unchangeable one, **gave his only begotten Son**, tore from his bosom **Him who was made in the express image of his person**, and sent him down to earth to reveal how greatly he loved mankind.” (*Ellen G. White, Review & Herald 9th July 1895 ‘The Duty of the Minister and the People’*)

In the penultimate statement, Ellen White said that Christ is “**a Son begotten in the express image of the Father’s person**”. In the latter she says He “**was made in the express image of his [the Father’s] person**”. She obviously saw a relationship between “**begotten**” and “**made**” but like Uriah Smith, she made it absolutely clear that Christ was not created.

It is very interesting that just two years prior to making the above two statements, Ellen White endorsed what Seventh-day Adventists were then teaching about Christ’s pre-existence. This happened when she was visiting New Zealand. She had arrived in New Zealand on February 8th 1893, and left 10 months later on December 13th. After saying that because of high winds it was not possible to use tents for evangelistic outreaches, she wrote

“In this country, the denominational ministers tell the most unblushing falsehoods to their congregations in reference to our work and our people. **Whatever false report has been started, is circulated by those who oppose the truth, and is repeated from church to church and from community to community.** The circulators of these falsehoods take no pains to find out whether or not they are true, for many of those who repeat the reports, though not the framers of them, still love the false reports, and take delight in giving them a wide circulation. They do not, like honest, just men, come to those who are accused, and seek to find out what is the truth concerning what they have heard in regard to their faith; **but without inquiry they spread false statements in order to prejudice the people against those who hold the truth.**” (*Ellen White, Review and Herald, 5th December 1893, ‘An appeal for the Australasian field*)

Human nature has remained unchanged. People are still doing the same today. They are still spreading false reports about people’s beliefs - without personally asking these people what they actually believe. Ellen White then proceeded to give an example of what she had just written about. She explained

“For instance, an effort was made to obtain the use of the hall at a village four miles from Hastings, where some of our workers proposed to present the gospel to the people; but they did not succeed in obtaining the hall, because a school-teacher there opposed the truth, and declared to the people that Seventh-day Adventists did not believe in the divinity of Christ. This man may not have known what our faith is on this point, but he was not left in ignorance. **He was informed that there is not a people on earth who hold more firmly to the truth of Christ’s pre-existence than do Seventh-day Adventists.**” (*Ibid*)

This statement is so clear that it is impossible to misunderstand. Ellen White was confirming SDA’s in what they were teaching about Christ’s pre-existence. This is that prior to the beginning of creation, He was begotten of God. How else can her words be understood? This is what Seventh-day Adventists, since their beginnings as a movement of people, had been teaching about Christ. This even remained the same for decades after she died.

The old-time religion – Christ is God

In 1907, a reader of the 'Signs of the Times' asked (amongst other things)

“If those that believe on His name were begotten of God, then **how is Jesus the "only-begotten of the Father"**? (*Signs of the Times, February 20th 1907, ‘Questions’*)

Note the question here. It was not regarding whether Christ is begotten – which in 1907 was still the standard faith of Seventh-day Adventists – but why, because those who are born of God are also begotten of God (and are therefore called sons of God) is Jesus called the "only-begotten” of the Father. The reply was given

“**Christ was not begotten in just the way in which men are.** He Himself declares. "I proceeded forth and came from God." John 8:42. **Just how this all is we do not know, but we do know this, that He was THE Son of God in a sense that no other was, because He was God;** and yet just as truly are those who believe in Him begotten of God and become His children. 1 John 3: 1.” (*Ibid*)

This was a recognised belief amongst Seventh-day Adventists. It was because Christ is begotten of God, He is God. Note the following.

“The first text that we quote is that one so familiar to everyone who knows anything of the Bible, John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God.** The same was in the beginning with God." That this refers to Christ is evident from verse 4: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men;" and from verse 14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." Indeed, we never heard of anyone who doubted that the evangelist has reference to Christ in this passage. **From it we learn that Christ is God.** That text alone, if we had no other, is sufficient to establish the divinity of Christ, for the word "divinity" means, "the nature or essence of God." **We believe in the divinity of Christ, because the Bible says that Christ is God.**" (E. J. Waggoner, *Signs of the Times*, March 25th 1889, 'The Divinity of Christ')

“Then what did he mean by saying, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God"? **He meant to impress upon the young man's mind the fact that the one whom he was addressing as Master was not mere man, as one of the rabbis, but that he was God.** He claimed for himself absolute goodness, and since there is none good but God, he thereby identified himself with God. And with this we may connect the statement of the apostle Paul, that "in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Col. 2:9. ...Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." Isa. 6:1-5. **We should not know to whom this refers, if our Saviour himself had not, in John 12: 40,41, quoted Isaiah's words in the tenth verse of this chapter, and applied them to himself. From these texts we have proof not only that the inspired writers call Jesus the divine Son of God, but that Jesus himself claimed to be God.**" (E. J. Waggoner, *Signs of the Times*, April 1st 1889, 'The Divinity of Christ (continued)')

“**He [the Son of God] was the only begotten of the Father.** In him dwelt all the "fullness of the Godhead bodily." **He was and is God.** He is the "brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." At various times he appeared to his people of old; but to confirm forever in our minds the knowledge and reality of this fundamental truth, Jehovah-Christ came and "dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." **Here was "God manifested in the flesh,"—Immanuel, God with us.**" (Editorial, *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times*, March 15th 1890, 'God manifested in the Flesh')

“When Christ was here on earth, "God was manifest in the flesh." 1 Tim 3:16. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Cor. 5:19. **Christ was God; it was by Him that the worlds were made, and it was the word of His power that preserved all things.** Heb. 1:3. He had equal glory with the Father before the world was (John 17:5); "for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." Col. 1:19. In Him dwelt "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Col. 2:9. Yet He was man at the same time. **John puts the matter very forcibly and plainly when he says:** "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God.**" "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:1, 14. **No words could more plainly show that Christ was both God and man.**" (E. J. Waggoner, *The Present Truth*, July 2nd 1891, 'God manifest in the flesh')

“One righteous man, if accepted as a substitute, could only atone for the sins of another one by losing his own life. Angels could not pay the debt to justice; none but **the Son of God, who is God,** can present a sacrifice of sufficient merit. The sacrifice is gladly made." (G. C. Tenney, *The Present Truth*, May 19th 1892, 'Emmanuel – God with us', see also *Bible Echo and Signs of the Times* March 15th 1892)

"It is an inspiring thought to the true disciple ever to realize that **our Saviour who has under taken our salvation, is a divine being, really and truly God, as properly so called as the Eternal Father himself**, and therefore almighty to save. Such a Saviour we need....Had the Jews really studied and believed their own prophets, they need not have been in ignorance concerning the Messiah, who and what he would be. Isaiah declared a virgin should bear a son, and his name should be called Immanuel. Isa. 7:14. And in the very first chapter of the New Testament this prophecy is quoted as being fulfilled at the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:23), and the name "Emmanuel" is interpreted by inspiration as meaning "God with us." **When this son was born, then the babe was God with us, Deity incarnated, the divine and the human combined**. It is wonderful, and with our finite minds it is incomprehensible, how this could be. **Yet God's word says it, and it is true beyond all doubt**. There are multitudes of facts embracing even the simplest processes of nature that are also to our minds incomprehensible, so that fact is no justification for unbelief. **That the babe of Bethlehem was " God with us," is the only key to unlock the mysteries of redemption, and the only explanation of his marvelous career.**" **Personally he is precisely like his Father in appearance, in nature, in character, in substance, and essence**. It was in this sense that his words to Thomas are to be understood: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen Philip could not grasp the thought, so he says, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." The Saviour with impressing gravity replies : "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father ?" (*G. I. Butler, Review and Herald, August 22nd 1893, 'Our Saviour, Divine'*)

"Christ said to them [the Jews], "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? **Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am**. Then took they up stones to cast at him," etc. John 8:56-59. **To them this was blasphemy. They fully realized this expression meant he was God, not only existing before Abraham did, but a title of the infinite God, uncreated, the God of their fathers. And they were evidently right. This Being who appeared to Moses in the bush, could be no other than "Emmanuel, God with" us, "the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace," "the Wonderful Counsellor."** (*G. I. Butler, Review and Herald, September 12th 1893, 'Christ the God of Israel'*)

"Of all the beings who have lived on this earth, Christ alone "did no sin." He is the only one of whom it could be said, "There is no unrighteousness in Him." Ps. xcii. 15. He Himself could without egotism declare Himself to be sinless. **And the reason why He could do this, was that He was indeed God**. "In the beginning was -the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God.**" " And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:1, 14. **Christ was God manifest in the flesh, so that His name was Emmanuel,—" God with us."** Matt. i. 23." (*The Present Truth, November 2nd 1893, 'Jesus Christ the Righteous'*)

"**Besides being Creator, Christ is Redeemer also**. Were He not the Creator, He could not be the Redeemer; for it requires the same power to redeem that it does to create. Christ assures us of His power to redeem by telling us of His power to create. **He says, " But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not; for I have redeemed thee."** "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside Me there is no Saviour." Isa. 43:1, II. Again: "For thus saith the Lord, that

created the heavens; God Himself, that formed the earth and made it," "There is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Saviour." Isa. 45:18, 21.

To Christ the psalmist prayed : "Create in me a clean heart, O God." Ps. 51:10." (A. G. Daniells. *The Bible Echo*, October 15th 1894, 'Christ the Lord of All')

"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 i. 14.

God in the Flesh.—We have already learned that the Word was in the beginning with God, "and the Word was God." Therefore when we are told that "the Word was made flesh " we know that it is the same as though it said, "God was made flesh." This is most sacred ground, and no one should presume to think of it, much less to speak or write of it in any other language than that of the Scripture itself. Untold evil has resulted from the attempt to define and explain God in human creeds." (*The Present Truth*, December 19th 1895, 'The Word made flesh')

"The Man Christ Jesus," was God made flesh, and He, "for every man," fought the battle against the enemy and won it. It is this armour, tried and invulnerable that Christians are to wear." (*The Oriental Watchman*, May 1898, 'God's Armour')

"Christ became incarnate to reveal God, and to show that He is Emmanuel, God-with-us. It was not merely during the incarnation that He was God-with-us, but He is that all the time." (G. E. Fifield, *Signs of the Times*, July 18th 1900, 'The River of Life')

"He [Jesus] revealed God, however, not so much by teaching, as by being. He was, and is, Emmanuel,—God with us." (G. E. Fifield, *The Signs of the Times*, September 26th 1900, 'The Meat-Offering')

"Yes, He came ! "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14. "God was manifest in the flesh." 1 Tim. 3:16. He was truly Emmanuel,— God with us." Matt. 1:23." (Charles L. Taylor, *Signs of the Times*, November 1st 1900, 'The Master's Coming')

"I know you," Christ declared to the Pharisees, " that ye have not the love of God in you." He spoke to them thus plainly because they could not discern His divinity under the veil of humanity. He was God in human flesh, and He, could not but work the works of God. Unbelief; prejudice, and jealousy beat about Him, and if His humanity had not been united with divinity, He would have failed and become discouraged." (Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, March 26th 1901, 'Lessons from the Christ-life')

"When on earth He [Jesus] was God clothed in flesh, the same as I am a man clothed in garments." (H. W. Cottrell, *Bible Training School*, January 1905, 'Divinity of Christ')

"While Jesus was a man, he was God, too. He was as much the Son of God when on earth as when commanding the angels around the throne through the eternal ages." (G. B. Thompson, *Review and Herald*, December 20th 1906, 'Millennial Dawn —No. 1')

"Christ, by inbred rights, could, without presumption or robbery, claim equality with His Father. He was God. But that He might vindicate His Father's righteous character from the base charges of Satan, and that it might be made possible to save fallen

man, "He humbled Himself." (*Thos. H. Craddock. Australian Signs of the Times, April 26th 1909, 'The Truly Great'*)

"Christ was God in the flesh. He was Deity incarnate, he was not a mere manifestation of God. He was God. He was every bit God clothed in human flesh and subjected to human limitations." (*Review and Herald, March 10th 1910, 'Emphasising the old religion'*)

This, during those early years, was a recognised and acceptable belief amongst Seventh-day Adventists. It was because Christ was begotten of God, "He was God" – albeit not the Father.

Exploring the begotten concept further

There is very little in Scripture, or in the spirit of prophecy, that informs us about the process of *how* Christ was begotten, but through the writings of Ellen White, we do have this precious insight.

"God's love for the world was not manifest because He sent His Son, but because He loved the world He sent His Son into the world that divinity clothed with humanity might touch humanity, while divinity lay hold of infinity. Though sin had produced a gulf between man and his God, divine benevolence provided a plan to bridge that gulf. And what material did He use? A part of Himself. The brightness of the Father's glory came to a world all seared and marred with the curse, and in His own divine character, in His own divine body, bridged the gulf and opened a channel of communication between God and man." (*Ellen G. White, letter 38a 1890, to J. S. Washburn, September 18th 1890*)

Ellen White refers to the "material" that God had used to bridge the gulf between man and God as a "part of Himself". This bridge is the Son of God. He alone bridges the gulf between man and God. She describes this "material" as the "brightness of the Father's glory". This is in keeping with Hebrews 1:3 where it is said of Christ

"Who being the brightness of his [God's] glory, and the express image of his [God's] person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high:" Hebrews 1:3

In this text, the word "person" is a translation of the Greek word *hupostasis*. The latter has a very interesting meaning. It can be used in a variety of ways. Basically it has the meaning of that which is the foundation or under-girding (sub-structure or substance) of something. It also means the essential structure of what something is (what makes something what it is). In this sense, as used in Hebrews 1:3, the word "person" is who and what God is – meaning, Christ is the "express image" of who and what God is (God's inner being/person/personality).

When Moses asked God "Show me thy glory" (see Exodus 33:18), God revealed His character

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6-7

God's character is His glory – or, it could be said, the glory of God is His character. Christ was a revelation of God's personality (God's person/character). He is the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His (inner) person (see Hebrews 1:3)

Repeatedly Ellen White described Christ as the “brightness of the Father's glory”. In one such place she wrote

“This world has been visited by the Majesty of heaven, the Son of God. “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 3:16. **Christ came to this world as the expression of the very heart and mind and nature and character of God. He was the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person.**” (Ellen G. White, *Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 1, page 23, 'The Great Medical Missionary'*)

So *when* was Christ begotten?

We know from Scripture that God created all things BY Christ (John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 3:9, Colossians 1:15-16, Hebrews 1:1-2). It follows therefore that Christ must have been begotten *before* anything was created.

Let us reason together. Let us, in our imagination, take away everything that God has created. This would mean taking away, not only our world, but also the entirety of the stars, planets and galaxies etc created by God. So what remains?

Some people, if they imagine a time when nothing existed except for God, will, in their mind, see God alone in an otherwise vast uninhabited and empty universe, but is this a correct view? Did not God create the universe? Did he not create *everything*, including time and space? What then did exist - if we take away *everything* that God created? The answer is - only God. In other words, when we remove *everything* created by God, all that will remain is God. This was when Christ was begotten of God.

Everything created by God is external to Him. This means that Christ was brought forth (begotten) of God prior to anything existing externally of God. This bringing forth of the Son therefore, was an *internal* action of God. It was not an act of creation (creating something that has an existence outside of God). Christ was begotten *of* God – not created.

If only God existed when Christ was begotten, then Christ must be both the Son of God and God. This is because only God can come (internally) from God. Remember what Ellen White wrote. She said that the material that God use to bridge the gulf between Himself and humanity was a “*part of Himself*” (see above). Christ therefore, because of this internal action of God, can only be God. God cannot bring forth of Himself that which is not God. Christ therefore, before the creation of anything, must have enjoyed an identity of essence (substance) with the Father.

Christ brought forth

Solomon, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote of Christ

“The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. **When there were**

no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.” Proverbs 8:22-31

Repeatedly we have been told through the spirit of prophecy that these verses in Proverbs 8 refer to Christ.

“Through Solomon Christ declared: "The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. . . . When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him."

In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, 29th August 1900, ‘Resistance to light. No. 3)

“The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old,” Christ says. “When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment; when He appointed the foundations of the earth; then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” But the only-begotten Son of God humbled Himself to come to this earth. He took the sinner’s place; the guiltless suffered for the guilty. This was the hiding of His glory.” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, February 22nd 1899, ‘The measure of God’s love’)

“And the Son of God declares concerning Himself: “The Lord possessed Me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting.... When He appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him.” Proverbs 8:22-30. “ (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 34, ‘Why was sin permitted’)

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpassing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by him as his right. This was no robbery of God. “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way,” he declares, “before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth; while as yet he had not

made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth." (*Ellen G. White, Review and Herald, 5th April 1906, 'The Word made flesh*)

These verses in Proverbs chapter 8, also these statements from the spirit of prophecy, all show that prior to anything being created by God, Christ was "brought forth" (begotten) of God, therefore He is truly the Son of God and God.

John wrote his gospel to show that Christ is truly the Son of God.

"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: **But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.**" John 20:30-31

John's opening words tell us that Christ, in His pre-existence, was God

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God.** The same was in the beginning with God. **All things were made by him;** and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men" John 1:1-4

Commenting on these verses (John 1:1-4), Ellen White explained

"**How precious are these words! By them some have been led to believe in Christ as the Son of God.** ... The writer of these words plainly shows that Jesus Christ is one with the Father. Christ is called the Word. **He is the first-begotten of the Father.**" (*Ellen G. White, Ms 111 1903, 'October 22nd 1903, That they may be one; As we are one'*)

I AM THAT I AM (I will be what I will be)

When Moses stopped to look at the burning bush that was not consumed by the fire, and after God had said to him that he should go to the Pharaoh and lead the Hebrews out of slavery, Moses said unto God

"...Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, **What is his name? what shall I say unto them?** Exodus 3:13

God replied to Moses saying

"And God said unto Moses, **I Am That I Am:** and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **I Am hath sent me unto you.** And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, **the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.**" Exodus 3:14-15

Notice that God referred to Himself as the "I AM" ... "the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob".

Jesus, 1500 years later, when the Jews were disputing His identity, said to them

“... Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Before Abraham was, I am.**” John 8:58

Ellen White commented

“It was Christ who from the bush on Mount Horeb spoke to Moses saying, “**I AM THAT I AM.... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.**” Exodus 3:14. This was the pledge of Israel’s deliverance. So when He came “in the likeness of men,” He declared Himself the **I AM. The Child of Bethlehem, the meek and lowly Saviour, is God “manifest in the flesh.”** 1 Timothy 3:16. And to us He says: “**I AM the Good Shepherd.**” “**I AM the living Bread.**” “**I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**” “**All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.**” John 10:11; 6:51; 14:6; Matthew 28:18. **I AM the assurance of every promise. I AM; be not afraid. “God with us” is the surety of our deliverance from sin, the assurance of our power to obey the law of heaven. ... God has adopted human nature in the person of His Son, and has carried the same into the highest heaven. It is the “Son of man” who shares the throne of the universe. It is the “Son of man” whose name shall be called, “Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”** Isaiah 9:6. **The I AM is the Daysman between God and humanity, laying His hand upon both.**” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 25, ‘God with us’)

“The Shekinah had departed from the sanctuary, but in the Child of Bethlehem was veiled the glory before which angels bow. This unconscious babe was the promised seed, to whom the first altar at the gate of Eden pointed. This was Shiloh, the peace giver. **It was He who declared Himself to Moses as the I AM. It was He who in the pillar of cloud and of fire had been the guide of Israel.**” (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 52, ‘The Dedication’)

“**The incarnate I AM is our abiding Sacrifice. The I AM is our Redeemer, our Substitute, our Surety. He is the Daysman between God and the human soul, our Advocate in the courts of heaven, our unwearying Intercessor, pleading in our behalf His merits and His atoning sacrifice. The I AM is our Saviour.**” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, May 3rd 1899, ‘The Word made Flesh’)

“The truths of the third angel’s message have been presented by some as a dry theory; but in this message is to be presented Christ the Living One. **He is to be revealed as the first and the last, as the I AM, the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and morning Star.** Through this message the character of God in Christ is to be manifested to the world. The call is to be sounded: “O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, **Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.** He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom.” Isaiah 40:9-11.” (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies, Volume 6*, page 20, ‘The work for this time’)

Interesting is that some translations have an alternative reading of God saying to Moses “I am that I am”. The Complete Jewish Bible translates Exodus 3:14 this way

“God said to Moshe, “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh [**I am/will be what I am/will be**],” and added, “Here is what to say to the people of Isra’el: ‘Ehyeh [**I Am or I Will Be**] has sent me to you.’” Exodus 3:14 (Complete Jewish Bible, copyright © 1998 by David H.

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Here we can see that this translation of the Scriptures uses in this verse the Hebrew term “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh”, and puts in parenthesis as an alternative reading “I am/will be what I am/will be” This translation is very interesting because in the Miles Coverdale translation (the very first printed English translation of the complete Bible) it says in 16th century English language

“God saide vnto Moses: I wyl be what I wyll be. And he sayde: Thus shalt thou saye vnto ye children of Israel: I wyl be hath sent me vnto you.” Exodus 3:14 Miles Coverdale translation 1535

Using 21st century English we would say “God said unto Moses: I will be what I will be. And he said: thus shalt thou say unto the children if Israel: I will be hath sent me unto you.”

In my studies I have found that as an alternative to “I AM THAT I AM”, there are many commentaries and lexicons that give the rendering “I will be what I will be”. One such commentary that had over 60 contributors is the 1919 Peake’s commentary. These contributors were such as professors of Bible languages and professors of Biblical exegesis etc. This commentary says with reference to Exodus 3:14

“I will be that I will be” is supported by Robertson Smith, Davidson, Driver, M’Neile, and others {the meaning will be more clearly conveyed to the English reader by the translation, “I will be what I will be. It brings out the implications both of the root and tense of the verb hayah. The root denotes rather becoming than being, and the tense (imperfect) marks uncompleted process or activity” – A.S.P}. (Rev George Harford, M.A. Hon. Canon of Liverpool, Peake’s Commentary on the Bible, 1919 page 172)

The New International Version (which some purport to have used the best available manuscripts) has a footnote for Exodus 3:14. It says (as an alternative reading for “I AM THAT I AM)

“or I will be what I will be” (footnote, Exodus 3:14 New International Version)

A similar footnote is also found in the New English Bible. This one says

“I am ... I am or I will be what I will be” Footnote to Exodus 3:14 New English Bible”

In a book on Old Testament theology, there is a statement that I believe is very interesting. It says (referring to the words of God in Exodus 3:14)

“First let us examine the words that follow from Moses’ request for the name of the God who has spoken to him. The Hebrew for those capitalised words is ‘EHYEH ASHER EHYEH. The verbal form of ‘EYEH’ is the third person singular masculine imperfect of the verb ‘HAYAH’. This verb ‘HAYAH’ does not mean ‘to be’. It is more nearly understood by the verb ‘to become’ in English ... though we cannot totally exclude the idea of ‘being’.” (George A. F. Knight, ‘A Christian Theology of the Old Testament’ pages 40-41, ‘God known in His Self-Revelation’)

This same author later says

“The word 'EHYEH' is in this 'imperfect' form of the verb. 'EHYEH' is just as rightly translated by our future tense as by our present tense. Therefore it is just as correct to translate it by 'I shall become what I shall become', as by the phrase 'I am becoming what I am becoming'." (*Ibid*)

I did ask about this verse (Exodus 3:14) on a Jewish website. Here is the answer I received

“The Hebrew word is אהיה. (Ehyeh)

The prefix is the Aleph. In Hebrew, and Aleph prefix implies first person future tense actions. So, the literal translation is "I will be that which I will be".... The translation on Chabad.org is "God said to Moses, "Ehyeh asher ehyeh (I will be what I will be)," and He said, "So shall you say to the children of Israel, 'Ehyeh (I will be) has sent me to you.'" (*Email to Terry Hill from Chabad.org 17th December 2020*)

In summary

The fact that Christ is begotten of God does not mean that He is not God. That would be a denial of what we have been told, by God, through His written word. Whilst Christ cannot be the same person as God the Father of whom He is begotten (two persons cannot be the same person), it does mean that there are two distinct personalities who together, prior to the creation of this universe, enjoyed an identity of essence, and are therefore both truly God. One personage - the Father, is unbegotten, whilst the other - the Son, is begotten of God. Christ therefore can only be - God in the person of the Son. Ellen White expressed this truth this way

“The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of the Father, is truly God in infinity, but not in personality.” (*Ellen G. White, Ms 116, December 19th 1905, 'An Entire Consecration'*)

If it is accepted as true that Christ “is truly God in infinity”, then it cannot be said of Him that He is not God.

End of article