Was Christ Begotten? If so, what does that mean?

In some older translations, the phrase "only begotten" is used to describe Jesus in such passages as John 1.14-18; 3.16-18; Hebrews 11.17; 1 John 4.9. This translation has led to much confusion, from doubting Jesus' deity and eternality to doubting scripture's accuracy. However, most newer translations more correctly translate this phrase as "one and only."

✝ The NET Bible, which translates this phrase as "one and only," says this: Or "of the unique one." Although this word is often translated "only begotten," such a translation is misleading, since in English it appears to express a metaphysical relationship. The word in Greek was used of an only child (a son [Luke 7:12, 9:38] or a daughter [Luke 8:42]). It was also used of something unique (only one of its kind) such as the mythological Phoenix (*1 Clem*. 25:2). From here it passes easily to a description of Isaac (Heb 11:17 and Josephus, *Ant.*, 1.13.1 [1.222]) who was not Abraham's *only* son, but was one-of-a-kind because he was the child of the promise. Thus the word means "one-of-a-kind" and is reserved for Jesus in the Johannine literature of the NT. While all Christians are children of God, Jesus is God's Son in a unique, one-of-a-kind sense. The word is used in this way in all its uses in the Gospel of John (1:14, 1:18, 3:16, and 3:18).

✝ The most trusted lexicon for Koine [biblical] Greek, known as BDAG, says the term means "one and only" or "unique."

✝ Inexplicably relegated to an appendix in his *Systematic Theology* [1233-1234] is Grudem's comment that modern linguistic study has concluded that the Greek word in question, μονογενής [mah-nah-geh-NACE] is not derived from μόνος [MAH-nos] meaning "only" and γεννάω [gen-NAH-oh, with a hard "g" like in "gap"] meaning "to beget" or "to bear," but rather from μόνος and γένος [GEH-nos] meaning "class" or "kind," so instead of understanding Christ as the "only begotten Son," we should be reading that he is the "one of a kind Son." "Only begotten" in Greek would be μονογενήτος.

There are some correct translations that refer to Jesus as begotten, in Acts 13.33; Hebrews 1.5; 5.5. While these translations are accurate, it is easy to show they are metaphorical.

✝ These three verses are quoting Psalm 2.7, in which the Greek verb γεννάω translates the Hebrew word ילד, meaning "to bear" or "to beget." In Psalm 2, God is talking to the king and says on this day he has "begotten" him. The king already existed and was alive, but on this day, God would anoint him as his ultimate representative on Earth, the king of his people. So the original use was metaphorical, not about a literal birth or creation.

✝ In Acts 13.33, Paul said that this verse prophesied about Jesus' resurrection, that it was in that moment that Jesus became God's anointed king. Of course, Jesus – whether you think of him as strictly human or as the unique divine person of orthodox Christianity – was already alive; in fact, he had been alive, dead, and now was resurrected to life again!

✝ In Hebrews 1.5, the author showed Christ's unique relationship to God the Father as the only Son of God. He is not talking about a literal birth or creation, rather he is talking about a designated relationship. In Hebrews 5.5, he showed that it was God the Father who glorified Christ by calling him Son and anointed king.

Christ is eternal as the Son of God, part of the triune God of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He was born to Mary when he chose to come to earth as a man, so he could die to pay the penalty for our sins, but this does not change the eternality of Christ and has nothing to do with the term "begotten" in the Bible. When the term occurs in the Bible, it refers to God the Father anointing him as king in Psalm 2; all other occurrences more properly should be translated as "one and only," as they are in the modern translations.