

Web Sermon text Son of God
What's in a Name?

Son of God

*So the holy one to be born will be called the **Son of God**.* (Luke 1:35)

As some of you know, my oldest son, Bart, serves in the United States Navy. He has been on deployment to the Persian Gulf for the last six months. His ship, the *Iwo Jima*, helped with the evacuation from Lebanon. Last week our family traveled to Norfolk, Virginia to celebrate Bart's homecoming. We had been waiting for this day for six months. When he left home, his cell phone was cut off and e-mails were not regular. What a moment Wednesday morning! There were three TV stations present, a radio station and a Navy band. Hundreds of wives, sons, brothers, sisters, grandparents, moms and dads cheered and cheered as the ship gradually pulled into port. Sailors, including my son Bart, manned the rails dressed in their blues. First, we watched the stroller brigade of moms bringing new babies born during the deployment to meet their dads for the first time. When I saw Bart, I threw my arms around him. He is solid as a rock. I am so proud of him. He is here today. Home for Christmas!

Sons are important. Today I want help you get to know another Son, a long-anticipated Son, much longer anticipated than six months. Open your Bible to Luke chapter one. We find the story of Jesus' birth in Luke chapter one. As you read the story, concentrate on the names given to the child. Today we are going to look deeply into one name.

²⁶ *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,* ²⁷ *to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.* ²⁸ *The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."* ²⁹ *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.* ³⁰ *But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.* ³¹ *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus.* ³² *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David,* ³³ *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."* ³⁴ *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"* ³⁵ *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. **So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.*** ³⁶ *Even Elizabeth your relative is going to*

have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. ³⁷ *For nothing is impossible with God.*” ³⁸ *“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38)*

What’s in a name? More than you might imagine. More than I imagined. I’ve heard and read the name, “Son of God” so many times that I would skip by it without pondering what it means. As a result I have not understood the richness of the name and thus the depth of Jesus. Our lack of understanding and misunderstandings of the name can actually reduce our devotion to Jesus. According to Paul in Ephesians chapter four, spiritual maturity involves growing in our knowledge of the Son of God.

Many people are confused with the concept of being a son of God. The New Testament uses the phrase “son of God” or its equivalence, more than 124 times, and that use is anchored in many references in the Old Testament. In addition to angels, Israel and King David are called sons of God. Believers are called sons of God. How is Jesus uniquely the Son of God? How do we make sense of sonship and what does it all mean for our lives today?

To tell the story of this rich name, I am going to share many references in the Bible. Let’s go back to the beginning. At creation God put Adam and Eve on the earth. In Luke’s genealogy of Jesus, Adam is called the son of God: ³⁸ *the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, **the son of God.*** (Luke 3:38) Adam sinned and so was expelled from the Garden. Curses came on creation and the serpent. However, in the curse on the evil serpent there was the first promise of a deliverer; an offspring, a son, a son from the woman, not the man. Genesis 3:15 says, ¹⁵ *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*” (Genesis 3:15)

Through history sons were born in danger and difficulty. Eve bore Cain, but he turned away from God, killing his brother Abel. God replaced Abel with the gift of Seth. Abraham and Sarah, in their old age, were given Isaac - from whom came Jacob, later named Israel - from whom later came King David and eventually through this line, the Christmas child - the Son of God who would crush the head of the evil serpent. In the Old Testament we see that the Son of God is the:

Expected Son: – Messiah

In the Old Testament “Son of God” was not a common title for the Messiah in pre-Christian Judaism, but we see hints of the connection confirmed in the New Testament. Come with me to see the:

Old Testament anticipation

The phrase “Son of God” was used in two main ways: first, of the entire nation of Israel and secondly, of kings, especially King David. Old Testament thought alternates between a corporate collective sense of sonship and personal sonship. In Exodus 4:22 we read, *‘This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,* The whole nation is called “son.” Hosea speaks in a similar way, he speaks for the Lord who says, ¹ *“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.* (Hosea 11:1)

This corporate sonship was the context for a focus on personal sonship in the king, who represents the people to God and God to the people. God says to David in 2 Samuel 7:14, ¹⁴ *I will be his father, and he will be my son.* In Psalm 2:7 we read, *He said to me “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.* In Psalm 89 we learn that this son will be the most exalted of kings and His kingdom will never end.

The Old Testament anticipates a Son who will crush the serpent; a son who will be a great king over Israel with a special relationship to God. Sonship is more than a natural right, but is the presence and blessing of God given by God to His chosen representative. In the New Testament we see confirmation of the Old Testament anticipation.

New Testament confirmation

This coming Son is the prophesied Messiah. Matthew 2:15 quotes Hosea 11:1: *And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”* The angel Gabriel says the baby will be great and will have the throne of his father David and His kingdom will never end. (Luke 1:32-33). Messiah in Hebrew is translated “Christ” in Greek. So when we read that Jesus is the Christ, the New Testament is saying He is the Messiah. Jesus’ good friend, Martha, connected the concepts of Messiahship and sonship. After Jesus raised her brother Lazarus from the

dead, Martha told Jesus, “*I believe that you are the **Christ,^b the Son of God, who was to come into the world.***” (John 11:25-27)

Jesus is the long expected son, the Messiah who would crush the head of the serpent and rule the world in peace and justice. He is the anointed Son anticipated from ancient times who would set the fallen world right - overthrowing oppressors, bringing back the peace of the Garden in a new kingdom of righteousness. Jesus is the ancient expected Son, the Messiah.

But to more fully grasp the Son of God, we must go back much further in time, before the Garden, before creation, to eternity past. A shock to many is realizing that this anticipated Son of God is much more than a great, godly, powerful king. Contrary to some theological liberal scholars, the Christmas child did not become the Son of God at His conception, birth, baptism or resurrection. Jesus is the eternal Son. He is divine.

Eternal Son – Divine

Jesus has always been the Son of God eternally. In history, He becomes the expected human son of Eve, the Messiah who crushes the evil serpent - but in eternity, He has always been Son in relation to the Father. Sonship does not imply inferiority. Jesus is not lesser than the Father, but plays a different role. Together with the Holy Spirit, they are One God, and yet each unique in personhood and function.

How do we know Jesus is not a lesser deity or merely a great religious figure? How do we know that Jesus, the Son of God, is equal to the Father? Let me take you to three key texts in the Bible that I call the “three ones”: John chapter one; Colossians chapter one and Hebrews chapter one.

Three “Ones”: John 1; Colossians 1; Hebrews 1

If anyone asks you to show them the deity of Jesus Christ in the Bible, remember to take them to the three ones. JCH can stand for Jesus Christ, John, Colossians and Hebrews. Listen carefully to the Word of God from each of the three ones. John chapter one:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . . ¹⁴The Word

^b Or *Messiah*

became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . .¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (John 1:1-3, 14, 18)

Jesus is the one and only Son who created the world, who comes from the Father to make Him known.

Listen to Colossians chapter one:

*¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the **Son** he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, (Colossians 1:13-19)*

Jesus, the Son, is fully God in every sense.

Listen to Hebrews chapter one:

*¹ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his **Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The **Son** is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. ⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my **Son**; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my **Son**"? (Hebrews 1:1-5).*

The three ones declare clearly and strongly that Jesus' sonship is unique. He is not a lesser god. He is truly God. He is the Son of God in a way that no one else could ever share. He did not become the son of God. He is literally God from all eternity, the second person of the holy trinity. He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father. The expected Son of God, Messiah, is the very One who is the eternal divine Son. Amazing. Overwhelming. Did anyone see this truth about Jesus as the Son of God before now?

Old Testament anticipation matched by New Testament confirmation receives affirmation by many. The New Testament presents a remarkably large and diverse group of individuals who referred to Jesus as the Son of God. We see affirmation of His divine sonship by many.

Jesus' divine sonship: affirmation by many

As I share the following scripture, ask yourself: are you one of these witnesses? Do you also affirm that Jesus is the Son of God? With whom do you identify?

-At Jesus' birth the angel Gabriel said, *He will be called the **Son of God**.* (Luke 1:35)

-In the opening line of his gospel, Mark writes, *The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the **Son of God*** Mark 1:1.

-God the Father at two crucial moments affirms Jesus' sonship; 1) at his baptism a voice from heaven says, *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."* Mark 1:11. 2)

-At the mount of transfiguration a voice from the cloud says, *"This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him!"* Mark 9:7.

-Even the devil, when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness said, *"If you are the **Son of God**, tell these stones to become bread."* (Matthew 4:3.) He tempted Christ to misuse His sonship.

-Even the demons knew the truth. When Jesus approached a demon - possessed man we read, ¹¹ *Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the **Son of God**."* ¹ Mark 3:11-12.

-John the Baptist declared, ³⁴ *I have seen and I testify that this is the **Son of God**."* (John 1:34).

-When he met Jesus, an early disciple, Nathanael, declared to Jesus, *"Rabbi, you are the **Son of God**; you are the King of Israel."* He understood that the anticipated Son is the King, the Messiah.

-After Jesus stilled the storm, ³³ *Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the **Son of God**."* (Matthew 14:32-33)

-In his famous answer to the question, "who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Matthew 16:16

-Jesus was aware of His divine sonship. He said, ²⁷ *"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the **Son** except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the **Son** and those to whom the **Son** chooses to reveal him.* (Matthew 11:27)

-At His mock trial, *again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ ^a the **Son of the Blessed One?**”*

⁶² *“I am,” said Jesus. “And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*

⁶³ *The high priest tore his clothes. “Why do we need any more witnesses?” he asked. ⁶⁴ “You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?”* Mark 14:61-63.

-Roman centurions testified, ³⁹ *And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the **Son of God!**”* (Mark 15:39), (Matthew 27:54)

-Finally our last witness came to Christ in a dramatic way. He previously thought Jesus was a dangerous fraud and tried to stamp out Christianity in the Roman Empire. He had Christians jailed and killed. Right after Paul’s eyes were opened to the truth, we read in Acts 9, ²⁰ *At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the **Son of God.*** Acts 9:20

All these many witnesses affirm that Jesus is the Son of God. What do you affirm? If a verse were written about you, what would it say? Do you deny that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you admit He is the Son of God, but resist Him? Do you try to ignore Him? Where are you with Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

This Son of God, the long-expected Messiah, the eternal divine Son of the Father came to earth. The Son of God came to enable us to become sons of God. And He came to show us how to be good sons. The expected, eternal son is also the exemplary Son, our Savior and Brother.

Exemplary Son – Savior and Brother

The truth just becomes even more wondrous and amazing. Jesus is the son of Eve and Mary; the new Adam who crushes the evil serpent. Jesus is also the eternal Son of God the Father. As the one and only God-Man, son of God, son of Mary, He alone is able to make a way for us to become sons of God. We too can become sons of God.

He Saves: We too can become sons of God

^a Or *Messiah*

Of course Jesus is the unique Son of God and always will be. None of us will become part of the Triune God, but in amazing language the Bible says we can join the family of God. Listen to Hebrews chapter 2 verses 10-11. ¹⁰ *In bringing many **sons** to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.* ¹¹ *Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the **same family**. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them **brothers**.* (Hebrews 2:10-11)

In His capacity as the Son of God, Jesus has the power to bring people into an experience of sonship with God the Father. Paul says in Galatians 4, ⁴ *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law,* ⁵ *to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* ⁶ *Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.”* ⁷ *So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.* (Galatians 4:3-7)

I am overcome by the privilege that God gives us to become His sons, to become Jesus’ brothers and sisters, to join His family. How can this happen? Not everyone is a son of God in this sense. It is not automatic. The Apostle John tells us how to become a child of God: ¹² *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* (John 1:12)

Only those who receive the Son of God as their personal Savior have the right to be children of God. How do you receive Him? John makes it so clear at this end of his gospel, when he says, ³¹ *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the **Son of God**, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* (John 20:30-31)

Being raised in a Christian home does not make you a son of God. Attending church dozens or hundreds of times does not make you a son of God. You become a son of God by personally exercising faith in the expected, eternal Son of God. Anyone can become a son of God by believing in Jesus Christ. If you have never done that or are not sure you have, I urge you today to trust in the Son of God. The Bible says, *“If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:9).

We exist as a church to help people follow Christ, starting with ourselves. God has touched us with His truth, and we are looking today and being reminded of, all over again - of the high privilege and the wonder of being His child through faith in the Son of God. The Apostle John said it well: *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* (1 John 3:1). If you trusted in Jesus long ago, or today, and know you are a son of God, I invite you to reach for new depths in your knowledge and appreciation of your sonship and His sonship - which makes yours possible.

Not only is the Son of God, our Savior, who enables us to become sons of God, but He is also our brother who exemplifies sonship. He shows us the perfect example of how to be a son of God the Father. Jesus obeys and so must we. He lived to please His Father.

Obeys: – We too must please the Father

As sons of God, we too must live to please the Father. In the Gospel of John chapter five, verse 30, Jesus says something that He repeats over and over, *“I seek not to please myself but him who sent me”* (John 5:30). Jesus did not come to earth to please Himself, but to please His Father who sent Him. We should live the same way.

As good sons, we should live to please the Father, not ourselves. While Christmas should be a time of giving, it is often a time of getting. We can focus on what we want for Christmas, not on what we will give. We can focus on what we want to do over the holidays, rather than on what we can do for others. My wife Tamara wants us to go visit her elderly aunt in the nursing home on Christmas Day. That is not what would please me, but I’m sure it would please the Father.

As your family works through how to celebrate the holidays; as you consider what you will attend or what you will sit out of, consider not what will please you, but what will please the Father.

Spiritual maturity is to become more and more conformed to the likeness of God’s Son (Romans 8:29). The Son of God pleased His Father in every way. Maturity is a process that transforms us from living to please ourselves - to living to please the Father. As we make more choices to please the Father,

we become more and more like the Son of God, who sets the model of sonship for us. How will you please the Father, more?

Paul says maturity involves growing in the knowledge of the Son of God (Ephesians 4:13). My hope today is that you have grown a bit in your knowledge of the Son of God so that you will be more devoted to Jesus Christ.

As wonderful as it was for me to embrace my son Bart at the port in Norfolk, Virginia, - it is much more wonderful to embrace the Son of God who entered our world at the manger in Bethlehem.

Jesus is the Son of God, the messianic son expected from ancient times, the eternal, divine Son of God the Father, who as our Savior enables us to become sons of God, and as our Brother, exemplifies sonship. So what are we to do? If you have never done so, trust in the Son of God in order to become one of the sons of God. Then follow the Son by pleasing the Father.

Personally, studying what's in this Name, Son of God, has motivated me to please the Father, has deepened my gratitude for being made a son of God and has moved me to deeper worship of Jesus who is the one and only great Son of God. Let us glorify the Son of God who was and is and now has come. I will give the Apostle John the last word from 1 John five, verse 20:
²⁰ *We know also that the **Son of God** has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his **Son** Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20)*

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McKinney Fellowship Bible Church
2801 Orchid Drive
McKinney, Texas 75070
972-547-7000
www.mcfbc.org
www.brucebmilller.com