

IBN SULTAN

# CHRISTIANITY COMPARED WITH ISLAM



**SON OF GOD:**  
what do the Qur'an and the Bible say?

الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ

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# INTRODUCTION

Do you believe in Jesus?

“Of course I do!” you might answer. Like other Muslims around the world today, you might honour Jesus as a real, historical person, born of a virgin, whose message and ministry was from God. You might be quick to point out that believing in Jesus is essential to being a Muslim: “He is a Messenger of Allah and one of the great prophets, after all!”

Is Jesus the Son of God?

This question is much more divisive. For Muslims, the idea that Jesus is God’s son is not just strange, but deeply offensive and blasphemous. “God,” you might respond, “is far above having a son!” Perhaps you would say we should accept the oneness of God (*tawhid*). After all, “to join partners to Allah is the unforgiveable sin (*shirk*)!” And as the Qur’an points out, God “begets not, nor is he begotten.”<sup>1</sup>

You might say it’s all a misunderstanding, since the ancient Christians wrongly called Jesus ‘Son of God’ to make sense of his virgin birth or the miracles he performed.

You might reason too that Jesus was only a Messenger who came to preach *tawhid*. “He wouldn’t dream of calling himself the Son of God!” Surely the early Christians just got it wrong...

In the Qur’an, we are told on several occasions that Jesus was mistaken by Christians as a literal son of God.<sup>2</sup> But are there sound reasons to support this claim? In this booklet we will consider what both the Qur’an and the Bible have to say on this important subject.

- Is Jesus the Son of God because he was born of a virgin?
- Is Jesus the Son of God because he performed outstanding miracles?
- Is Jesus the Son of God because he was naturally ‘begotten’ by God?
- What did Jesus claim about himself?

By carefully considering these questions together, we can begin to build a clearer picture of the real message and identity of Jesus.

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1 Surah 112:3

2 Surah 23:91



# IS JESUS THE 'SON OF GOD' BECAUSE HE WAS BORN OF A VIRGIN?

## † Christian Perspective

Jesus' birth is described by some of his earliest followers. Matthew's Gospel originated with Jesus' own disciple, an educated tax-collector. Luke's Gospel was written by a medical doctor from Antioch after gathering evidence from Jesus' closest followers. In these two accounts of Jesus' life, the title 'Son of God' is used 25 times with reference to Jesus. But what does it really mean?

In Luke's Gospel<sup>3</sup>, Jesus' birth is announced to Mary, a virgin, by the angel Gabriel. Mary is told to name him Jesus. The angel Gabriel says Jesus will be called 'the Son of the Most High'. He will sit on the throne of David and his kingdom will never end. The angel is very clear: Jesus is coming into this world for a reason – to rule as a king forever.

But why is Jesus called 'the Son of the Most High,' when 'the Most High' means God?

First century Jews were very familiar with the message of the previous prophets, and many anticipated a specific figure - the Messiah (meshiach, or 'Anointed One') – a unique ruler who would be called 'the Son' of God.

This is why Jewish religious leaders frequently asked Jesus, "Are you the Messiah? The Son of the Blessed One?"<sup>4</sup> By asking Jesus if he was the "Son of the Blessed One", **these teachers were not asking how Jesus was born:** they wanted to know if he was God's promised Messiah ('Christos' in Greek). Jesus' close disciple Simon Peter also makes this connection: "**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God,**" he says.<sup>5</sup>

The important point is this: **Jesus' Jewish followers, and Jewish enemies, understood 'Son of God' to be a reference to Israel's promised Messiah.<sup>6</sup> No one in the Bible connects Jesus' title, 'Son of God,' to his virgin birth.**

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3 Luke 1:26-35 - In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 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, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." "How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on 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.

4 Mark 14:61. Out of reverence, Jews are careful not to say the name of God out loud, so refer to him indirectly as 'the Blessed One'.

5 Matthew 16:16

6 Jesus' title as Son of God also pointed to his divinity. This is a big subject, but we will explore it a bit more later in this booklet.

## Islamic Perspective

As a Muslim, you will recognise the seventh-century Qur'an as Allah's most perfect revelation to humanity. This Qur'an gives a different account of the birth of Jesus ('Isa). Here, as in the Bible, the story begins with the angel Gabriel bringing good news to Mariam (Mary) that she would bear a son. She was to name him 'Christ Jesus': he would be righteous, speaking to humanity "in his cradle and in his manhood."<sup>7</sup>

Although the Qur'an's description bears some similarities with that of the Bible, it does not directly explain the significance of Jesus' title, 'Christ.' There is no definition in the Qur'an or the Hadith as to the meaning of the term 'Messiah' (al-Masih). In particular, **the Qur'an doesn't mention any connection with the promises made through earlier prophets about a coming Messiah.**

In addition to the Qur'an, your beliefs about the virgin birth may be influenced by the insights of respected early Qur'anic commentators, such as Ibn Kathir (1300-1373), who is recognised especially by Sunni Muslims.<sup>8</sup> His commentary describes the Messiah as "a mighty son who will have a great future":

*"Isa [Jesus] was called "Al-Masih" (the Messiah) because when he touched (Mash) those afflicted with an illness, they would be healed by Allah's leave."<sup>9</sup>*

So the Qur'an and respected Muslim scholars agree that *Jesus was born of the virgin Mary*. Jesus is a miraculous, mighty son with a great future, and 'a word' from Allah. His birth is a miraculous event, a sign (ayah) of Allah's power (Surah 3:50; 21:91). Muslims have a high regard for Mary - **but, significantly, Jesus is only presented as her son, and never as the Son of God.**

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7 Surah 3:45-47 [Pickthall translation] - (And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a word from him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in this world and in the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (to Allah). He will speak to mankind in his cradle and in his manhood, and he is of the righteous. She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal has touched me? He said: So (it will be). Allah creates what He will. If He decrees a thing, He says to it only: Be! and it is.

8 Although the tafsir of Ibn Kathir is highly regarded by Sunni Muslims, it is worth bearing in mind that his interpretations are those of a fourteenth-century Islamic scholar, he is far-removed from the Hebrew language and culture of Jesus, and first century Judaea.

9 Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 'Delivering the Good news to Maryam of 'Isa's birth': [http://www.qatafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=541](http://www.qatafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=541)

## Comparison

Muslims insist that Jesus holds a special place within Islam, but do not see his honoured status and virgin birth as reasons to consider him divine. Jesus' birth is understood simply a sign of the power of Allah. The Qur'an still mentions Jesus' miracles, intellect, eloquence in childhood and honoured titles. Muslims will argue there are plenty of reasons to honour Jesus without having to call him Son of God.

The Bible and the Qur'an agree:

- Jesus' birth was announced by the angel Gabriel
- Jesus was miraculously born of the virgin Mary, by God's will
- Jesus is 'Christ', the Messiah (Masih)

But the texts diverge:

- In the Qur'an Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel, or several angels, bringing news that she will bear a son.<sup>10</sup> Though Mary is told that she will bear a son, *al Masih* (Messiah), the Qur'an does not explain the significance of this title.
- In the Bible, the angel Gabriel visits Mary with news of broader significance: God is going to fulfil his promises, recorded centuries earlier in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. The promised Messiah would sit on a throne as king forever, and 'save his people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21).

*Qur'anic understanding:* The Qur'an implies that **Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God just because he was born of virgin Mary.** But being born of a virgin is no sign of divinity, say Muslim scholars. Take Adam as an example. It simply shows the power of Allah.

*Christian understanding:* The early Jews and non-Jews didn't believe Jesus was the Son of God just because of his virgin birth. **They believed Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah, foretold by the prophets.**

## Does it matter that Jesus was born of a virgin?

What was the purpose of Jesus' miraculous birth? A large number of Muslims will say that Jesus' virgin birth simply shows the power of Allah, who needs only to say 'Be!' to bring something into existence.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation is problematic. After all, most people of faith do not need convincing that God is able to create something out of nothing. That's how God created the world, and Adam, who had neither father or mother. Would this not imply that Adam is a greater sign than Jesus?

For Christians, the virgin birth has significance for many reasons<sup>12</sup>:

- Jesus fulfils prophecies from centuries earlier, which promised the arrival of an eternal king over God's kingdom<sup>13</sup>
- In Jesus, God enters his creation without being created by another; he chooses to dwell among the people he created.<sup>14</sup> Jesus, the Son, exists before all things were created, but takes on human nature alongside his eternal, divine nature.
- Jesus would be a 'second Adam': where Adam's fall into sin brought death to the world, Jesus' continued sinlessness would bring life<sup>15</sup>

"For God has done what the law [of Moses], weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh[.]" (Romans 8:3)



## Notes

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10 Surah 3:47; 19:16-35

11 See Surah 4:171. In *The Noble Qur'an*, a footnote on this passage appeals to this same argument: "When one of the two nouns [in a genitive construction] is Allah, and the other is a person or a thing, e.g. Allah's House (Bail-ullah); Allah's Messenger (Rasul-ullah); and Allah's slave ('Abdullah); Allah's spirit (Ruh-ullah), the rule for the above words is that the second noun, e.g., house, messenger, slave or spirit is created by Allah and is honourable in His sight, and similarly, Allah's spirit may be understood as the spirit of Allah, in fact it is a soul created by Allah, i.e. 'Isa (Jesus). And it was His Word: "Be!" - and he was [i.e. 'Isa was created like Adam]." See also Sahih Bukhari 4, 55:644.

12 The virgin birth is deeply symbolic and meaningful detail of how God chose to enter his creation. Importantly though, Christians do not regard the virgin birth as the cause or source of Jesus' divinity. Matt Perman writes, "if Jesus is God, then he has always been God. There was never a time when he became God, for God is eternal. *But Jesus has not always been man*. The fantastic miracle is that this eternal God became man ... approximately 2,000 years ago."

13 Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7

14 John 1:1, 1:14; Colossians 1:15-17

15 Romans 8:2-4; 1 Corinthians 15:22

## ? Questions to consider

- Muslims often say Christians call Jesus the Son of God because he was born without a human father. If this is so, why is Adam – who had neither father or mother – not considered divine by Christians or Jews?<sup>16</sup>
- Can you find any verses in the New Testament suggesting people saw Jesus as the Son of God because of his virgin birth?
- Ibn Kathir connects the title of Messiah with the Arabic word ‘masah’ (anoint) as a reference to Jesus healing people. But Hebrew scholars connect this title to the word, ‘mashiach’ (the anointed one). Does Kathir’s view fit reflect the Bible’s descriptions of what the Anointed One will do? (Psalm 2, Psalm 110, Matthew 22:41-46)<sup>17</sup>



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<sup>16</sup> In Luke 3:38, some Bible translations appear to call Adam as ‘son of God.’ If you have time, you can use an interlinear Bible (Greek-English) to consider how this ‘son of God’ title (tou Theou) is different from that used of Jesus, ‘the Son of God’ (ho huios tou theou) (e.g. Matthew 16:16; John 11:27).

<sup>17</sup> As Jesus points out, Psalm 110 describes the Messiah ‘sitting at God’s right hand.’ In ancient societies, sitting at a ruler’s right hand was a mark of unparalleled authority and relationship. The right hand was also the hand a father would use to bless his heir. See Genesis 48:17-18, Luke 22:69 and Acts 7:55-56.





# IS JESUS THE 'SON OF GOD' BECAUSE HE PERFORMED OUTSTANDING MIRACLES?

## † Christian Perspective

In the Bible's gospel accounts, Jesus' disciples, like his opponents, were not convinced of his divinity simply because of a few miraculous 'party tricks'.<sup>18</sup> If someone performs miracles it does not necessarily make them divine. Throughout the Bible, God often empowers flawed humans to perform amazing miracles. Moses, for example, strikes a rock and brings forth water.<sup>19</sup> The prophet Elisha even raises a child from the dead!<sup>20</sup> Miracles in themselves are not sufficient evidence that Jesus is divine.

### But Jesus is different from other miracle-makers.

- None of the earlier prophets dared to claim they could forgive sins; this required an authority exclusive to God himself (Isaiah 43:25). During his ministry, Jesus claimed to forgive sins.<sup>21</sup>
- Earlier prophets didn't strike fear into spiritual beings, but Jesus did.<sup>22</sup>
- Others never claimed authority over angels, or authority to judge on Judgment Day – but Jesus did.<sup>23</sup>
- Jesus claimed authority both to lay down his own mortal life, *and to raise it up again by his own power*.<sup>24</sup>
- Jesus calmed a storm and walked on water – things only God did in the Old Testament.<sup>25</sup>
- Jesus' disciples claimed authority *in the name of Jesus* when performing miracles, and his disciples baptised new believers in the name of Jesus, 'the Son'.<sup>26</sup>
- Most importantly, prophets before Jesus never, ever, received the worship of others. But Jesus did.<sup>27</sup>

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18 See Matthew 9:32-34; Mark 3:22

19 Numbers 20:2-13

20 2 Kings 4:8-37

21 Matthew 9:2-6; Mark 2:10

22 Mark 5:7

23 Matthew 16:27; 19:28; 25:31

24 John 2:19-21, 10:18; Mark 14:58; Matthew 27:40

25 Matthew 8:23-27; 14:22-33


26 Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; 3:6

27 Luke 24:52

**Jesus was different because of the bold claims which accompanied his miracles.**

How did devout Jews – the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes – react? The Bible tells us they were furious with Jesus for making blasphemous claims about himself.<sup>28</sup> In fact, it was for this very reason that religious leaders demanded that Jesus be crucified.

But it's worth remembering that Jesus' closest disciples were all devout Jews, too. **The disciples knew that none but God himself had the right to claim the authority Jesus did – but something about Jesus convinced them to accept his claims and follow him.**

 **Notes**

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28 Matthew 9:3; Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21; John 10:33

## Islamic Perspective

As a Muslim, you will not have any problem with the idea that Jesus performed outstanding miracles. But you might emphasise that all Jesus' impressive miracles were only those of a Messenger, done with Allah's permission.

The Qur'an doesn't go into much detail about the miracles of Jesus, but Surahs 3 (verse 49) and 5 (verse 110) speak in passing of several miracles performed by him which are first described in the Bible. In both the Qur'an and the Bible:

- Jesus heals the blind
- Jesus heals lepers
- Jesus raises the dead

Additionally, the Qur'an attributes other miracles to Jesus not mentioned in the Bible. In the Qur'an:

- Jesus speaks words of supernatural knowledge as a baby
- Jesus breathes life into clay birds

However, as we have considered, performing miracles does not justify calling Jesus the 'Son of God'.

As well as describing Jesus as a miracle-working messenger, many Muslims regard Jesus *himself* as a miracle. After all, Jesus is born of a virgin, and is uniquely described as 'a word from Allah' (Kalimatullah) and the 'spirit from Allah' (*ruhun mina' Llah* – see Surah 4:171). However we interpret these descriptions, we can see they set Jesus apart from other prophets.

In Sahih Bukhari, a ninth-century hadith trusted by most Muslims today, we are given another reason for the uniqueness of Jesus: he is the sole human being in history who has escaped the touch of Satan in his mother's womb.<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising then that Jesus is considered a sign (ayah) – both for his mother, the virgin Mary, and 'for (all) peoples' (Surah 3:45; 21:91). **Muslims say Jesus is miraculous, but this does not make him the Son of God.**



### Notes

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<sup>29</sup> Sahih Bukhari 54:506 and 55:641.

## Comparison

### Did Jesus perform miracles by his own authority, or with God's permission?

The earliest accounts of Jesus' life, including the New Testament gospels, do not simply present Jesus as performing miracles 'with God's permission,' as implied by some later writings.<sup>30</sup> In the gospels, Jesus claims his own authority to forgive sins, to judge the world, to rule over heavenly beings, and even to impart life: that which God alone can do.<sup>31</sup> It is often assumed that Christians refer to Jesus as the 'Son of God' because he performed miracles, but the Bible does not support this claim. Even so, the nature of Jesus' miracles can help point us to a better understanding of his identity – Jesus said so himself.<sup>32</sup>

### Did Jesus speak as an infant?

According to the Qur'an, Jesus spoke from his cradle as a baby, and received a book from God (3:46). These claims are not found in the Bible, and they raise several important questions.

If Jesus received a book (the *Injil*), how was it received, and when? What happened to it? The Qur'an provides no further details, and since there's no evidence outside the Qur'an, this claim is impossible to verify. If we maintain the *Injil* was simply a revelation (not written down) then we are faced with a claim which is impossible to prove, or disprove, with any confidence.

The earliest text outside the Qur'an which offers a similar 'infancy narrative' describing Jesus' speech as a baby is *Pseudo-Matthew*<sup>33</sup>, which falsely names Jesus' disciple Matthew as its author. This was written in the sixth century, drawing on folklore which began to emerge late in the second century. Christians reject *Pseudo-Matthew* because it was written several centuries later, and shows no reliable connection to the disciples of Jesus.<sup>34</sup>

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30 For example, see Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 'The Description of 'Isa and the miracles he performed': [http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=538](http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=538)

31 In John 5:19, Jesus remarks, "The Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing...". Read on its own, this can be mistaken for showing Jesus as a mere servant of God. However, this chapter makes clear that this is not what Jesus means. Rather, he is saying he lives and acts in complete unity with His Father. Just moments later, he adds a bold claim about his own authority: "The Son gives life to whom he pleases..." (verse 25; see also Matthew 11:27).

32 John 14:11

33 *Pseudo-Matthew*, Chapter 18 states that: *Mary and Joseph were very much afraid lest the child [Jesus] should be hurt by the dragons. And Jesus said to them: Do not be afraid, and do not consider me to be a little child; for I am and always have been perfect; and all the beasts of the forest must needs be tame before me. Chapter 20 adds: And it came to pass on the third day of their journey [to Egypt], while they were walking, that the blessed Mary was fatigued by the excessive heat of the sun in the desert; and seeing a palm tree, she said to Joseph: Let me rest a little under the shade of this tree. ... Then the child Jesus, with a joyful countenance, reposing in the bosom of His mother, said to the palm: O tree, bend your branches, and refresh my mother with your fruit. And immediately at these words the palm bent its top down to the very feet of the blessed Mary; and they gathered from it fruit, with which they were all refreshed.*  
[www.newadvent.org/fathers/0848.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0848.htm)

## Questions to consider

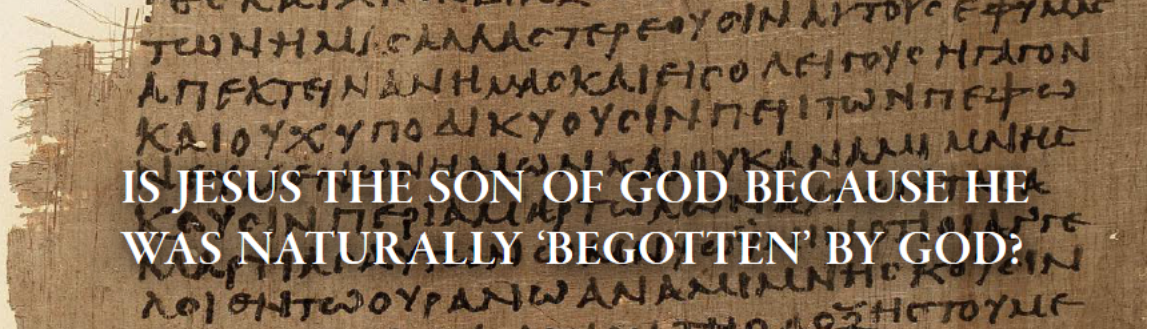
- Muslims often say Christians call Jesus the Son of God because he performed impressive miracles. If this is so, why don't Christians and Jews worship other miracle-working prophets, like Moses and Elisha?
- What do you think about Jesus' bold claims, such as his claim to forgive sins, or to preside over Judgment Day? Which other prophets claimed to resurrect themselves?
- Aside from his virgin birth, why is Jesus any different from other prophets of Islam?



### Notes

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<sup>34</sup> Just as Muslims judge hadith writings based on a chain of transmission (isnad), Christians trust writings which demonstrate the greatest 'apostolic authority', connecting them to Jesus' disciples in the first century.



# IS JESUS THE SON OF GOD BECAUSE HE WAS NATURALLY 'BEGOTTEN' BY GOD?

## † Christian Perspective

One of the Bible's most famous passages, John 3:16, gives us an insight into the Christian description of Jesus, the Son of God.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, some English translations of this and other Bible passages have caused some misunderstanding about what 'Son of God' really means. Take a look at the following popular translations of this verse:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his **one and only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."  
(John 3:16, NIV translation)

"For 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, KJV, or King James translation)

The original Greek word, translated 'one and only' or 'only begotten' in these passages, is *monogenes*. It's important that we understand the meaning of this word. After all, in English, the word 'beget' is commonly associated with literal reproduction, when a new child is born through the union of their mother and father. But the word *monogenes* means something very different.<sup>35</sup>

The word *monogenes* is based on two root words: monos (one) and genos (class). It's sometimes translated as 'unique' or 'one of a kind'. The word occurs nine times in the New Testament, and in each case it's not concerned with how the son was born, but that there were no others like him.

John 3:16 is not saying God 'begets' a child biologically. In fact, moments earlier (John 3:13), Jesus claims to have come from heaven and refers to himself as the 'Son of Man' (*huios tou anthropou*).<sup>36</sup> Rather, John 3:16 references Jesus' uniqueness; he's 'one of a kind'.

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<sup>35</sup> *Monogenes* – also found in the New Testament descriptions of Jesus – is sometimes translated as 'unique' or 'one of a kind', based on the two root words from which it is formed: monos (one) and genos (class). In the New Testament, this word occurs nine times – five in reference to Jesus. Other passages using this word, such as Luke 7:12, refer specifically to an 'only child': "behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother." In each case, the word is not concerned with how the son was born, but the fact that there were no others like him. Similar uses occur in Luke 4:2 and Luke 9:38.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel 7:13-14 – to get a better understanding on why Jesus uses these seemingly contradictory titles of 'Son of God' and 'Son of Man', see the section below: *What did Jesus claim about himself?*

## 🌙 Islamic Perspective

The Qur'an frequently and firmly opposes Christians who worship Jesus as the begotten son of God.<sup>37</sup> Such worship seems blasphemous: not only does it treat Allah like a mere human being, but it elevates a created being to receive worship which belongs to Allah alone.

### Allah is one, and not created

Surah 112 is a short chapter recited by many Muslims around the world several times every day; it is considered equivalent to reciting a third of the Qur'an. Here, the idea of God naturally 'begetting' a son is strongly opposed:

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ١

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ٢

لَمْ يَكِلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ٣

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ٤

“Say: He, Allah, is One,  
Allah, the Eternal,  
**He begets not, nor is He begotten,**  
And there is none like unto Him.”

**Many Qur'anic passages like this oppose an assumed Christian belief that God bore a child.** In each case, the Arabic word used is *walad* (ولد) – implying a physical son, produced by the union of a mother and father.

The Qur'an also interprets the Christian doctrine of 'the Trinity' as a union of God, Mary, and Jesus.<sup>38</sup> This is considered blasphemous for depicting God as a created being (Surah 5:72).<sup>39</sup> In agreement with the Qur'an, Ibn Ishaq (c.704-770) shows how early Muslims perceived Christian belief:

“[Christians] argue that he is God because he used to raise the dead, and heal the sick, and declare the unseen; and make clay birds and then breathe into them so that they flew away ... but He is He and Jesus and Mary. Concerning all these assertions the Quran came down.”<sup>40</sup>

37 Surah 2:116, 10:68, 19:35, 19:88, 23:91, 37:151-152, 39:4, 43:82, 72:3.

38 Surah 5:116

39 Early Christian writings, church teachings and church history do not support this understanding. Christians do not see Jesus as a created being, and do not see Mary as a member of the Trinity.

40 Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah [The Life of the Prophet]*, p.271-272 (English translation)

## Allah has no children and no wife

The Qur'an assumes that 'Son of God' is a literal description of how Jesus was born and rejects the identification of Jesus as 'Son of God'. The Qur'an notes that in addition to Jesus, Christians also call *themselves* 'children of God'.<sup>41</sup> The Qur'an interprets this title literally and considers it a blasphemy against Allah.

"He is The Originator of the heavens and the earth! **How can He have a child, when He has no wife?** He created all things and He is the All-Knower of everything." (Surah 6:101)

In his commentary on this passage, Ibn Kathir reasons that Allah cannot have a child because he has no wife, since any child must be "the offspring of two compatible spouses"<sup>42</sup>:

"For the child is the offspring of two compatible spouses. Allah does not have an equal, none of His creatures are similar to Him, for He alone created the entire creation. ... He has created everything and He is All-Knower of all things. **How can He have a wife from His creation who is suitable for His majesty, when there is none like Him? How can He have a child then? Verily, Allah is Glorified above having a son.**"

## Comparison

### Understanding the word *monogenês*

The New Testament uses the word *monogenês* to describe Isaac, who is called the "only son" of Abraham.<sup>43</sup> This might seem strange, since the Bible plainly describes how Abraham fathered two sons: Isaac and Ishmael.

The book of Hebrews (11:17) says, "*by faith Abraham ... offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his **only son.***"

The word *monogenês* is used here to describe Isaac as a unique son. Isaac's miraculous birth to a barren mother, Sarah, *uniquely fulfilled God's promise* to Abraham.<sup>44</sup> It is in this sense of 'uniqueness' that the word is later used of Jesus.<sup>45</sup>

Although some people accuse Christians of believing God fathered a literal son, this is a significant misunderstanding. Christian creeds written centuries

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41 Surah 5:18 - But the Jews and the Christians say, "We are the children of Allah and His beloved." Say, "Then why does He punish you for your sins?" Rather, you are human beings from among those He has created.

42 Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Meaning of Badi' [commentary on Surah 6:101]: [www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=984](http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=984)

43 Hebrews 11:17

44 Genesis 17:17-21; see also Romans 9:7-9

45 John 1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 3:18; and 1 John 4:9



before the advent of Islam insist that Jesus was not created at all. The Nicene Creed of 325 AD carefully describes Jesus as ‘begotten, not made.’

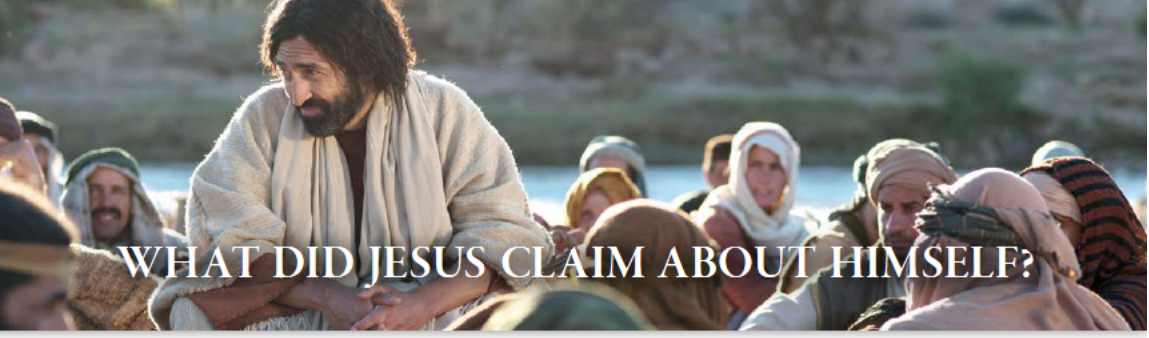
**The Christian church has never believed Jesus to be God’s biological son. The New Testament description of Jesus as the ‘only-begotten’ speaks of something far more profound: He is unique, the ‘one and only’.**

## Questions to consider

- Read the Bible passages, John 3:16 and Luke 7:12. These each use the same Greek word (*monogenēs*) to describe an ‘only’ or ‘unique’ child. Why do you think this word is chosen in each case?
- Does the Bible teach that God begets (i.e., reproduces to give birth to a child)? If so, where do you see this?
- According to the Qur’an, Mary bears a son without having a husband. Why then does Allah need a wife to have a son?
- Can you find any Bible passages that teach, or imply, that Mary is the wife of God?



## Notes



# WHAT DID JESUS CLAIM ABOUT HIMSELF?

## † Christian Perspective

In the Bible's four gospels, Jesus often taught in parables and stories, and people frequently asked him, and each other, who he was. Was he the Messiah from God whom Israel had been promised centuries before? Was he a rabbi (teacher)? A prophet? Something more?

### The heir to God's Kingdom

In response to people's questions **Jesus told a famous story, the Parable of the Tenants – which hints at his true identity.**<sup>46</sup>

*"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.' "But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard." (Mark 12:6-7)*

In this parable, Jesus uses images and themes which were familiar to his first-century Jewish audience. For example, a 'vineyard' was a frequent image used to describe the Israelites (eg. Isaiah 5), while the owner of the vineyard is God.

In Jesus' parable, the 'wicked' tenants and servants represent Israel's religious elites, such as the Pharisees. We are told that these 'tenants' are responsible for killing the messengers (prophets) sent to them by the vineyard owner (God). At this point, the vineyard owner, God, takes a final step to try and restore relationship with his wicked tenants: he sends *his* son. Yet instead of respecting the vineyard owner's son, the wicked tenants seize the opportunity to kill him too.

This parable makes a shocking claim about Jesus. Firstly, it foretells Jesus' death at the hands of the Israelites. Secondly, **Jesus claims to be more than the servant prophets who came before him.** He describes himself as the Master's 'son' and 'heir'. Jesus claims he is the sole heir of God's Kingdom. No connection is made to miracles or a virgin birth; rather it is Jesus' unique authority and relationship with his Father which is emphasised.

46 Mark 12:1-12

## The unique Son

In one early gospel account, dating from a little after 60 AD, **Jesus claims to have a unique relationship with God the Father:**

*“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)*

In this passage, **Jesus clearly states he is the unique Son of God.**<sup>47</sup> He uses a title not used of anyone else in the Bible. Furthermore, he claims no one can fully know him, the Son, except the Father. And no one can know the Father except him, the Son.

## One with the Father

*“[Jesus said] ... **“I and the Father are one.”** Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, **“I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”** **“We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”**” (John 10:30-33)*

In this brief exchange, we see another astonishing claim by Jesus: that he is one with God, the Father.<sup>48</sup>

The meaning of this statement is clearly understood by his Jewish hearers. For a mere man to say such things was a terrible crime against God. **When Jesus claimed to be ‘one with the Father’, he was claiming a unique authority and unparalleled relationship with God.**

## What titles does Jesus give himself?

### The Son of God

Before the first century, parent and child metaphors had occasionally been used to describe God’s relationship with his people. In the Bible, God often speaks of his people like a ‘firstborn son.’<sup>49</sup> For Jews, it wouldn’t have been strange to call Jesus ‘a son of God’ in the sense that he was ‘a righteous person’.

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47 Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 11, describes a sequence of events which strongly point to Jesus’ divinity. Jesus’ identification as the Son shortly follows a scene where he is asked by John the Baptist’s followers whether he is the promised Messiah. His response is to quote from the prophet Isaiah 35:5-6, who described the signs which would accompany the Messiah’s ministry [see also the Dead Sea Scroll, 4Q521]. Jesus identifies John as the messenger prophesied by the prophet Malachi, preparing the way for God himself to enter his Temple (Malachi 3:1). John’s ministry pointed emphatically to Jesus (see John 1:29-34).

48 In John 17:11, Jesus prays for his disciples to be “one, even as we are one.” Some interpret this statement to mean Jesus is only one with the Father in *purpose*. Yet even if this were so, the claims of John 10:22-30 repeatedly draw lines between Jesus’ authority and that which Jews understood to be unique to God. For one example, compare John 10:28 with Deuteronomy 32:39.

49 Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1

But Jesus didn't call himself 'a son' of God – but *the* Son of God [ho huios]. He identified Himself **uniquely as the only Son of the Father**.<sup>50</sup> This was scandalous: *The Son of God* was not a general title but a special one which assumed uniqueness and authority.

## Son of Man

'Son of Man' was Jesus' preferred way of describing himself. He used this title more than 80 times<sup>51</sup> – and it's also found in Jewish writings outside the Bible.<sup>52</sup>

But it's not a contradiction of Jesus' other title, 'Son of God'. 'Son of Man' links back to Daniel's prophecy, of 553 BC, recorded in the Old Testament.<sup>53</sup> When religious authorities asked Jesus if he was the Messiah, Jesus responded<sup>54</sup> by pointing them to this prophecy:

*"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was **one like a son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; **all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.**" (Daniel 7:13-14)*

When Jesus calls himself the Son of Man, he's saying he has a specific, divine authority and exclusive right. It's a term many ancient Jews associated with a heavenly figure possessing universal authority:

- The Son of Man would come in the glory of the Father with angels<sup>55</sup>
- The Son of Man would come riding clouds with great power and glory<sup>56</sup>
- The Son of Man would send angels to gather his people from the earth<sup>57</sup>

Like the 'vineyard' of Israel, 'Son of Man' is not a literal title – it doesn't mean Jesus has a biological father. Rather, **'Son of Man' is a figurative name which communicates Jesus' uniqueness, purpose and authority.**

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50 See John 1:18. Today, we know the difference in talking about 'beauty queens' (a general category) and 'The Queen' (Elizabeth II, a specific person). Similarly, Jesus' title of The Son cannot be dismissed as a general one.

51 See Matthew 10:32; 20:28; 24:27, 37, 39; Mark 8:38; 10:45; 14:60-62 and Luke 17:24, 26, 30

52 1 Enoch 48:3-6

53 See Mark 14:62. Daniel's 'Son of Man' is described in a very distinctive way which points to his divinity. For example, the honour given to him matches up with that given to God in the preceding chapter (Daniel 6:26).

54 Mark 14:61-62

55 Mark 8:38

56 Mark 13:26

57 Mark 13:27

## How can Jesus exist eternally with God the Father?

The Bible teaches that Jesus is God: he exists eternally in perfect unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is uncreated (John 1:1), but has entered history to dwell among his creation, 'fully God and fully human.' Of course, this is difficult to understand!

But it's similar to the way most Muslims see the Qur'an.<sup>58</sup> Sunni Islam maintains that the Qur'an has existed eternally, inscribed on tablets in Paradise but sent down in history in the form of the mushafs (written revelations of Muhammad). It is both uncreated and revealed within history. It is eternal and physical at the same time.

Certainly, questions of eternity stretch our imaginations. But this complexity is no reason to reject God's revelation.



### Notes

## Islamic Perspective

The Qur'an gives no indication that Jesus ever referred to himself as the Son of God. But it does set Jesus apart as a distinctive Prophet, and addresses Jesus' identity a number of times. So how does Jesus describe himself in the Qur'an?

### A sign from Allah

In Surah 3, Jesus offers a brief explanation of who he is. Firstly, Jesus is a sign (*ayat*) from Allah:

*"I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I fashion for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe." (I have come to you), to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was (Before) forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So fear Allah, and obey me."* (Surah 3:49-50, Yusuf Ali translation)

### The servant prophet of Allah

According to Surah 19, the newborn Jesus speaks miraculously from the cradle<sup>59</sup> to confirm his status as a prophet and 'servant of Allah':

*"[The infant Jesus] said, "Indeed, I am the servant of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I am and has enjoined upon me prayer and zakah as long as I remain alive and [made me] dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me a wretched tyrant. And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive.""* (Surah 19:30-33, Sahih International translation)

### A messenger of tawhid

Jesus is quoted as strongly condemning the Christian belief – or the Qur'anic understanding of it – that 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary':

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<sup>59</sup> See also Ibn Kathir on verses 27-29: (27. Then she brought him to her people, carrying him. They said: "O Mary! Indeed you have brought a thing Fariy.") (28. "O sister of Harun! Your father was not a man who used to commit adultery, nor your mother was an unchaste woman.") (29. Then she pointed to him. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle"). [www.qatafsir.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2685&Itemid=75#1](http://www.qatafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2685&Itemid=75#1)

*“They do blaspheme who say: “Allah is Christ the son of Mary.” But said Christ: “O Children of Israel! worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.” Whoever joins other gods with Allah, Allah will forbid him the garden, and the Fire will be his abode.”* Surah (5:72)

Sura 5 describes a future conversation between Allah and Jesus, which again centres around claims of Jesus’ divinity:

*“Allah will say: “O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?” He will say: “Glory to Thee! never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart...”* (Surah 5:116, Yusuf Ali translation)

## **Not the final prophet**

Jesus also denies his divinity elsewhere in the Qur’an.<sup>60</sup> In Surah 61, he goes further, claiming that he points to a future Messenger to follow him: Ahmad.<sup>61</sup>

From each of the Qur’anic verses which claim to quote Jesus directly, we see him affirming that:

- He is the son of Mary, a virgin
- He is a Messenger to Israel, but not Allah’s final Prophet
- He is himself a Sign from God, and brings a sign
- He is a miracle-worker and healer
- He lived, would die, and be raised alive<sup>62</sup>
- He preached *tawhid*, and condemned those who worship him
- He was given a scripture (*Injil*), and spoke as a new-born infant

## **What else does the Qur’an say about Jesus?**

### Word from Allah

In addition to direct quotations of Jesus in the Qur’an, he is also mentioned indirectly. **Jesus is twice presented as a Word from Allah** (*kalimatim-minhu*).<sup>63</sup>

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60 Surah 19:19, 30

61 Surah 61:6

62 Surah 19:33

63 Surah 3:45-46

This description of Jesus as ‘a Word’ bears some similarity to a description of Jesus in the Bible’s Gospel of John, but with important differences.<sup>64</sup> The Qur’an rejects the Bible’s description of Jesus as the uncreated ‘Word’ who created all things.<sup>65</sup> **In Islam, Jesus is a Word from Allah, but he is also a created being.**

### Spirit from Allah

In the same way, **Jesus is described in the Qur’an as ‘a spirit from him [Allah].’**<sup>66</sup> The Qur’an is not simply saying Jesus *received* a spirit from Allah (compare Surah 15:29); it is saying that **Jesus was himself a spirit from Allah.**



## Notes

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64 In John’s gospel, Jesus is described as ‘the Word’ who existed before all created things. John emphasises this by employing the language at the start of the Bible (see Genesis 1:1). He writes that (1:1,3): “In the beginning was the Word [Ar. kalima/ Gk. logos], and the Word was with God, *and the Word was God* ... through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

65 In ancient Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament, called Targums, the Targum on Genesis 1:1 reads: ‘in the beginning, the word of God created...’ The Aramaic ‘memra’ (‘word’) is used here as a term for God.

66 Surah 4:171 (transliteration: almaseehu AAeesa ibnu maryama rasoolu Allahi wakalimatuhu alqaha ila maryama waroohun minhu)



## Comparison

### Why did Jesus insist he was a Messenger of Allah?

Almost all of Jesus' direct quotations in the Qur'an are preoccupied with correcting those who worship him. Similarly, the frequent title of Messenger or prophet makes a specific point: Jesus is not so much saying 'I am a prophet', as 'I am only a prophet, and not divine.'

**Christians are understandably sceptical of this portrait of Jesus**, particularly when most of the words he speaks in the Qur'an are less concerned with *affirmative* teachings, and more concerned with *negative* challenges to correct his own misguided followers.

**If *tawhid* truly was the focus of Jesus' teaching ministry, it would appear that his teaching was least effective among those closest to him.**

### Does the Qur'an seem confused about the true identity of Jesus?

On one hand, the Qur'an is clear and consistent in stating that Jesus is not divine. It describes the supposed events surrounding Jesus' birth. On the other hand, there are few clear references to Jesus' own teaching, and several verses appear to elevate Jesus far above any of the prophets that went before him.

## Questions to consider

- In Surah 3:45-46, we are told that Jesus' birth is good news for all. What is this good news?
- Do you think Jesus was successful as a Messenger of *tawhid*?
- What does it mean to say Jesus was a spirit from Allah? (Surah 4:171)

## Notes

## Who is Jesus?

Christians have no disagreement with many of the claims made in the Qur'an about Jesus. There's no problem with the basic claims of Surah 112, since the Bible has already stated that God is one<sup>67</sup>, God is eternal<sup>68</sup>, God does not procreate children<sup>69</sup> and God is not created<sup>70</sup>.

**But the question remains: *who is Jesus?*** How should we understand his identity?

We've established that:

- the Bible does not claim Jesus as the Son of God because he was born of a virgin, or because he performed miracles.

In the Bible, Jesus claims to be the Son of God because he demonstrates:

- a unique and eternal relationship with the Father
- unique authority belonging to God alone
- unique fulfilment of the prophetic promises made before him
- Christians do not believe God procreates, and the word 'begotten' used of Jesus is not describing him as a created being.
- There is no evidence in the Bible that Mary was considered God's wife.

## Son of God?

The title, 'Son of God,' used to describe to Jesus in the Bible remains controversial. For many Muslims, it seems strange at best, and blasphemous at worst. Yet in spite of the accusations of the Qur'an, **Christians do not condone belief in or worship of more than one God.**

The Qur'an claims that Jesus rejected the title of 'Son of God,' but this rejection is based on a misunderstanding: the Qur'an has misinterpreted Christian teachings and misunderstood what 'Son of God' meant to the first hearers.

By calling himself the Son of God, Jesus did not mean that God had fathered a biological child. Nor was he adding partners to the one true God.

**Jesus was not merely bringing a message from God. He was the message: a clear glimpse of the holy God,** walking among those he created, and offering forgiveness and salvation to all who would turn from their sin and follow him.

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67 Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29; James 2:19; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Timothy 2:5

68 Psalm 90:2; Isaiah 44:6; Revelation 1:8

69 Hosea 11:9; Isaiah 42:8; Psalm 24:1

70 Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-3; James 1:7-18

## Your decision

*"[The risen Jesus] said to them, This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. **He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."*** (Luke 24:44-45)

Christians and Muslims agree that no one can go to Paradise unless their sins are forgiven. Jesus claims to forgive sin. He has taken our place in death, 'to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45).

**Jesus paid the debt of our sins in full. If we trust in him, we will be with him in Paradise. This is good news!**

*"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.""* (John 8:12)

*"And this is that testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son."* (1 John 5:11)

Will you believe in this Jesus?

It is an important decision. One with consequences.

**The decision is yours.**



**Notes**

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**H**ave you ever wondered why you believe what you believe? How do you know what you believe is true? Is it just a leap of faith or can it be verified with evidence?

It's important to examine what we believe. Eternity depends on it! If you are sure that what you believe is true then there should be no fear of examining it more closely.

In this booklet the Christian and Islamic views of Jesus are compared and contrasted. Since the first century the Bible has identified Jesus as the 'Son of God'. But what exactly does it mean to call Jesus by this title? Should we take it literally, or is it only an expression? Is the Qur'an justified in rejecting this title for Jesus?

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