

“Of the Father’s Love Begotten”

Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • December 24, 2017 • KSYC

Today is the fourth Sunday of the Advent season and it also happens to be Christmas Eve. This month, I have been expounding on the great songs of Christmas, and how they reference the Bible. The three hymns I’ve explained so far are: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” “What Child is This?”, and “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming.” Today, I’ll dwell on a hymn that has mostly been forgotten by Christian churches, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten.”

“Of the Father’s Love Begotten” is the most well-known hymn written by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius. He was a 4th century lawyer from Spain who served as a powerful judge and then as a court official for Roman Emperor Theodosius, a Christian. But when he was 57, powerful and famous, he left his civic life to write hymns and poems. Before he died in 413 A.D, he had written some of the most beautiful hymns of his day, used throughout the medieval church.

Originally in Latin, it was translated into English by John Mason Neale and Henry Baker in the 1850s. The music paired with the hymn is called *Divine Mysteries* or Divine Mystery, a 12th century chant-like tune. The hymn originally had nine verses, telling the story of man’s creation, fall and redemption. It ends in a stanza of praise to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How long must we praise our Trinitarian God? The hymn answers, “Evermore and evermore!” Today, typically, only four or five stanzas are used. I’ll explain only the five most common.

In the first stanza, Prudentius wrote,

Of the Father’s love begotten
ere the worlds began to be
He is Alpha and Omega
He the source, the ending He
of the things that are, that have been
and that future years shall see
evermore and evermore!

This stanza begins by stating that Jesus is God the Father’s beloved only-begotten Son, whom he gave to the world, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son”* (John 3:16). In eternity past, this Son says in Psalm 2:7, *“The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’”* So when Jesus was baptized, the Father’s voice from heaven was heard, saying, *“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”* (Matt 3:17).

“Begotten” is a most misunderstood word in the Bible. Jews, Muslims, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity because they reject the idea of God having a Son. Their idea is that to be “begotten” can only be accomplished by a sexual relationship between a man and a woman. Obviously, God cannot have this kind of relationship with a woman. But the word “begotten” in the Bible transcends the human idea of being physically born. The Bible says that from eternity past, before anything was created, God the Father and God the Son already existed in a Father-Son relationship. There never was a

moment in eternity past when the Son did not exist and was not the Son of God. God the Son is from everlasting to everlasting.

Micah 5:2 prophesied about the Son of God assuming human flesh by being born in Bethlehem, *"But you, O Bethlehem . . . from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."* John 1:1 confirms, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* So Jesus himself affirms who he is in John 8:58, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."*

The hymn praises the Father as the loving Creator, citing Revelation 22:13, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* This doesn't mean he has a beginning or an end, but he is from everlasting to everlasting. In Genesis 1:1, we read, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,"* and in Acts 14:15, he *"made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them."* The godless theory of evolution did not come until the atheist Charles Darwin appeared in the 19th century.

The second stanza is about the birth of a Savior and Redeemer:

O that birth forever blessed
when a virgin, full of grace
by the Holy Ghost conceiving
bore the Savior of our race
and the Babe, the world's Redeemer
first revealed his sacred face
evermore and evermore!

Isaiah 7:14 prophesied the birth of a child by a virgin, *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."* So Matthew 1:23 tells us the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)."* Jesus was born to be God dwelling with his people.

How can a woman bear a child without having a sexual relationship with a man? It is only the Holy Spirit, the Giver of life, who can create life inside the womb. So we read in Matthew 1:18, *"When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit."* Psalm 104:30 tells us about how God creates life, *"When you send forth your Spirit, they [creatures] are created."* And since the baby Jesus was conceived by the Spirit, he is the Holy Son of the Most High God (Luke 1:32, 35). But he is also truly man because he has a human mother. This is another mystery: one Person with two natures, divine and human. His other names are "Savior," from Matthew 1:21, *"he will save his people from their sins,"* and "Redeemer," from the song of Mary in Luke 1:68, *"he has visited and redeemed his people."*

How must we Christians respond to God the Father's saving and redeeming love in Christ? We respond with adoration, praise and thanksgiving! The third stanza says:

O ye heights of heaven adore Him
angel hosts, His praises sing
pow'rs, dominions, bow before Him
and extol our God and King
let no tongue on earth be silent
every voice in concert ring
evermore and evermore!

The first two lines are from Psalm 148:1–2, *“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!”* The next lines are from Philippians 2:10–11, *“so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* In the end, all people, believers and unbelievers, will acknowledge Jesus that Jesus is Lord and bow down to him.

Stanza 4 continues this praise and adoration of God and Christ, saying:

Christ, to Thee with God the Father
and, O Holy Ghost, to Thee
hymn and chant and high thanksgiving
and unwearied praises be;
honor, glory, and dominion
and eternal victory,
evermore and evermore!

This stanza repeats Jude 25, *“to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.”* in Revelation 5:13, all the heavens resound with this praise, *“And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’”*

There’s a fifth verse included in some hymnals:

This is He whom Heaven-taught singers
sang of old with one accord,
whom the Scriptures of the prophets
promised in their faithful word.
Now He shines, the Long-expected,
let creation praise its Lord,
evermore and evermore!

Psalm 150:6 says, *“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!”* Luke 1:70 attests that prophets of long ago spoke of this long-awaited Christ, *“as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.”* In Matthew 13:17, Jesus told the Jews about the longing of the prophets to see him, *“many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see.”*