

John 1.18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

There are two manuscript traditions here. One says “only begotten Son” and the other “only begotten God.” Scholars debate which is correct, with many of the textual critics agreeing that since the earliest manuscripts contain “only begotten God,” and it is more likely that a scribe would change this difficult phrase to the more natural “only begotten Son” than the other way around, the original was “only begotten God.” If this is true, then this would be another instance where Jesus is called God because he represents God as the word made flesh (see John 20.28 for more on this).

Meanwhile others are unconvinced that this local tradition is correct because the manuscripts containing “only begotten God” are only found in the Alexandrian (Egypt) area, while the others reading “only begotten Son” are found in the Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine traditions. Furthermore, the phrase “only begotten God” is foreign to the language of the Gospel of John and directly contradicts John 17.3 which indicates that the only true God is the Father. It is possible that the “only begotten God” reading, though primitive, is not actually what John wrote, but instead an early corruption used to bolster the prologue of John to teach that Jesus was actually God. Versions that use “only begotten Son” include NJB, NKJV, KJV, YLT whereas nearly every modern translation has “God” instead of “Son” because the manuscript evidence for “God” is earlier.