

The following is a short excerpt from Bart D. Ehrman's book "Misquoting Jesus".

Emphasis in original:

One of the most intriguing antiadoptionist variants among our manuscripts occurs just where one might expect it, in an account of Jesus's baptism by John, the point at which many adoptionists insisted Jesus had been chosen by God to be his adopted son. In Luke's Gospel, as in Mark, when Jesus is baptized, the heavens open up, the Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove, and a voice comes from heaven. But the manuscripts of Luke's Gospel are divided concerning exactly what the voice said. According to most of our manuscripts, it spoke the same words one finds in Mark's account: "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11, Luke 3:23). In one early Greek manuscript and several Latin ones, however, the voice says something strikingly different: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." Today I have begotten you! Doesn't that suggest that his day of baptism is the day on which Jesus has become the Son of God? Couldn't this text be used by an adoptionist Christian to make the point that Jesus became the Son of God at this time? As this is such an interesting variant, we might do well to give it a more extended consideration, as a further illustration of the complexities of the problems that textual critics face.

The first issue to resolve is this: which of these two forms of the text is original, and which represents the alteration? The vast majority of the Greek manuscripts have the first reading ("You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"); and so one might be tempted to see the other reading as the alteration. The problem in this case is that the verse was quoted a lot by early church fathers in the period before most of our manuscripts were produced. It is quoted in the second and third centuries everywhere from Rome, to Alexandria, to North Africa, to Palestine, to Gaul, to Spain. And in almost every instance, it is the other form of the text that is quoted ("Today I have begotten you").

Moreover, this is the form of the text that is more unlike what is found in the parallel passage in Mark. As we have seen, scribes typically try to harmonize texts rather than to take them out of harmony; it is therefore the form of the text that differs from Mark that is more likely to be original to Luke. These arguments suggest that the less-attested reading — "Today I have

begotten you” — is indeed the original, and that it came to be changed by scribes who feared its adoptionistic overtones.

Some scholars have taken the opposite view, however, by arguing that Luke could not have had the voice at the baptism say, “Today I have begotten you” because it is already clear before this point in Luke’s narrative that Jesus is the Son of God. Thus, in Luke 1:35, before Jesus’s birth, the angel Gabriel announces to Jesus’s mother that “the Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the Power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore the one who is to be born of you shall be called holy, the Son of God.” For Luke himself, in other words, Jesus already was the Son of God at his birth. According to this argument, Jesus could not be said to have become the Son of God at his baptism — and so the more widely attested reading, “You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” is probably original.

The difficulty with this line of thinking — as persuasive as it is at first glance — is that it overlooks how Luke generally uses designations of Jesus throughout his work (including not just the Gospel but also the second volume of his writing, the book of Acts). Consider, for example, what Luke says about Jesus as the “Messiah” (which is the Hebrew word for the Greek term Christ). According to Luke 2:11, Jesus was born as the Christ, but in one of the speeches in Acts, Jesus is said to have become the Christ at his baptism (Acts 10:37-38); in another passage Luke states that Jesus became Christ at his resurrection (Acts 2:38). How can all these things be true? It appears that for Luke, it was important to emphasize the key moments of Jesus’s existence, and to stress these as vital for Jesus’s identity (e.g., as Christ). The same applies to Luke’s understanding of Jesus as the “Lord.” He is said to have been born the Lord in Luke 2:11; and he is called the Lord while living, in Luke 10:1; but Acts 2:38 indicates he became the Lord at his resurrection.

For Luke, Jesus’s identity as Lord, Christ, and the Son of God is important. But the time at which it happened, evidently, is not. Jesus is all these things at crucial points of his life — birth, baptism, and resurrection, for example.

It appears, then, that originally in Luke's account of Jesus's baptism, the voice came from heaven to declare "You are my Son, today I have begotten you." Luke probably did not mean that to be interpreted adoptionistically, since, after all, he had already narrated an account of Jesus's virgin birth (in chapters 1-2). But later Christians reading Luke 3:22 may have been taken aback by its potential implications, as it seems open to an adoptionistic interpretation. To prevent anyone from taking the text that way, some proto-orthodox scribes changed the text to make it stand in complete conformity with the text of Mark 1:11. Now, rather than being said to have been begotten by God, Jesus is simply affirmed: "You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." This is, in other words, another antiadoptionistic change of the text.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why*. San Francisco, CA, HarperSanFrancisco, 2005, Pages 158-161.