

Root of Jesse, Glorify Your Name!

Grant us...

† **Patient endurance** (vv.4,5)

† **Glorious encouragement** (vv.4,6-9)

† **Good hope** (vv.4,10-13)

In the name of Jesus, our coming King, dear Advent Christians:

Silently under the snow it's happening as we speak only a few hundred yards away. The power company cut down the oak trees along County Road F. But the trees are growing back as shoots spring out of the old stumps. That's the picture which the Holy Spirit holds before our eyes in this evening of Advent worship. God had carried out centuries of serious threat to punish his rebellious people. The LORD finally cut off the tree of Jesse, symbolic of the whole nation of Israel, when He had the Babylonians carry them away in to captivity. Isaiah foretold it, both the cutting of the tree and the growing of the stump. And now we hear the Lord's Apostle Paul sound a call that fills our hearts with Advent joy: **Root of Jesse, Glorify Your Name!** *Grant us...*

† **Patient endurance** (vv.4)

“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Our own culture has stories from the past that picture **Patient endurance**. One of my favorites comes out of Grand Canyon country where prospectors placed heavy loads on the backs of their donkeys. Maybe those pack mules weren't always so patient, but they were enduring. They could put one foot in front of the other up steep sided mountains and stay under the load until the master took it off.

But we also have stories of men giving up in the face of nature's endurance. One of our last family vacations during my boyhood was to the Redwood Forest around Eureka, California. Since then I've learned that pioneers had tried to clear the land for farming but finally gave up. The reason is something that impressed me as a boy without even realizing what a great picture of endurance stood before my eyes. Deep in the redwoods you can see stately trees rising hundreds of feet with their tops lost in the clouds – all perfectly in a row. Look closely, and you'll see the trees used to be branches, but are now growing right out of the trunk of the old fallen mother tree. Redwoods are one of very few that will show that kind of **Patient endurance** that made the pioneers finally give up on farming.

All of us know those difficult days when we just want to give up. Maybe you'd even like to dig a hole and pull the dirt down over your head, or at least crawl under the blankets for a day or two. Sometimes shame at our sins will do that to us. Guilt can crush out the glow of faith and joy like a heavy boot on a cigarette in a “No Smoking” zone. Add the hustle and bustle of a busy season and sometimes you just want to shout, “Stop the world! I want to get off.”

Our gracious God takes us back to the Holy Scriptures, the promises we'll hear repeated again and again about the coming Christ, in order to build up in us the **Patient endurance** of a towering redwood tree that won't give up even if an army of axes keeps swinging away. God's people thought all was lost for them as a nation and for eternity too. But God's promises kept them going so that we can celebrate today. Look at how patiently God's own Son endured under the cross, how kindly He carried all our guilt and sin to that cursed tree. Look at Christ and you won't ever want to give up as the **Root of Jesse** grants...

† Glorious encouragement (vv.4,5-9)

There's a sad part of each of us that wants to agree with the "scholars" who insist this next part is impossible. We come from so many different backgrounds. Start asking a few questions about your fellow worshipers and it becomes very obvious that we not only come from different parts of the country, our families were very different and our interests remain that way too. So many Americans, especially the religious ones, think there is no way to achieve any kind of unity except agree to disagree.

But as hard as that seems from a human perspective, God the Holy Spirit is here talking about something far deeper and richer than just "Ra! Ra!" "unity." The Holy Spirit's Greek original actually says, "a single-minded passion." This is hot stuff from heaven. It only comes to sinners on their knees confessing their personal and corporate guilt, then raised to new life in Christ Jesus. We see Him as God's answer to all our sins and shame, all our disunity caused by stubborn pride. We cannot even imagine this "single-minded passion," much less make it in ourselves. But listen more carefully, "***May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.***" When we keep confessing Him as our dear Savior, we can't help accepting "***one another... just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.***"

Jesus Christ did not wait for us to put up a Christmas tree before He planned a trip to Bethlehem. That announcement was made more than 500 years earlier through Micah, long before Christmas trees were ever invented. We didn't have to find some way to get accepted into the one chosen nation of God on earth. He planned all along to include Gentiles, us non-Jews in this great salvation. This is **Glorious encouragement** for these busy days when we could all use a servant. Listen again to the Lord's Apostle Paul: "***For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.'***" We not only see Jesus born to be our Savior, but we also hear the hymns and Christmas carols that honor Christ our Lord.

† Good hope (vv.4,10-13)

We spend so much time working to earn a living and enjoy the "harvest" of a paycheck that we often forget what an honor it is to be part of God's rich harvest of souls. He used His own Jewish people as cradle to bring the God-Man Jesus Christ to life as Lord and Savior of all. We broke every single commandment of God when we failed the first time to love God with all our heart and soul and mind. We broke God's Law like the glass in a window by our sins of idolatry, loving money and our own opinion more than God and His Word. It crumbled before we even got to loving our neighbor as ourself.

But God did not wait for us to get our act together. We never could. Nor does He wait for us now to bring about our own Advent joy and faithful preparation. This is God's work from first to last. We deserved to have God's car pull up with a siren and bullhorn shouting, "Get in. You're under arrest. You're going to jail." Instead, He pulls up like a rich millionaire gently approaching a homeless orphan to say, "Get in. I'll take care of all your needs. I'll adopt you into my family."

These are Good News – Gospel commands: "***Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.***" ***And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.'*** ***And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.'*** How can we refuse the gracious rule of God's own Son who sets us free from sin, death and hell? God's Son puts praise on our lips with new life in Christ from the stump of our own broken lives. It's the joy you feel after a long drive in blinding snowstorm. When you finally see the lights of home in the distance, the light fills you with hope as nothing else can. You know the door will be open and loving arms will welcome you there. Now your heart overflows with longing. "***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***" His power alone can make our Advent tree grow tall. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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