

**A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.**

**²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—**

³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

**He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.**

**He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.**

**⁵Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.**

¹⁰In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.

In the days leading up to Christmas, rest can elude us. Pastors and teachers and students and employees are all working double time to meet deadlines before the holidays. Parents are hurrying to plan vacations and purchase presents on top of it. “Restful” doesn’t describe our days before Christmas; “stressful” and “busy” and “tired” do. And a nap or a few extra hours sleep sound divine!

I can’t promise you that kind of rest – you might have to wait until Christmas vacation for it. But there is a much greater and more necessary kind of rest that God promises you – a rest he’d have you experience even in the middle of the busiest season of the year. A rest Isaiah says he gives you in the root of Jesse.

That might seem like a strange title for Jesus, at first, so let me explain. Jesse was the father of King David, and King David was the first in a line of kings from Judah that reigned over Israel for some 400 years. Isaiah pictures that line like a tree. In David’s day, it was flourishing, and Israel was thriving – both physically and spiritually. But the tree was rotting from the inside out. Kings from David’s line became more and more godless until God used Babylon like a finely sharpened axe to chop it down. For 500 years, no king from David’s line.

Until Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He was Jesse’s root – his God – but also a shoot coming from his line, born of one of David’s descendants, Mary. He was less of a tree and more

of a branch – he didn't seem regal or royal. Born and lived in poverty and meekness. But Isaiah said this was the king who would give his people rest.

Of course, the description Isaiah gives of him doesn't seem all that "restful" at first. He describes Jesus as a perfect judge – one who doesn't render a verdict based on what he sees with his eyes or hears with his ears, but on the truth. And that doesn't leave us with peace or rest, but with fear and terror. We do a pretty good job of putting up a front for others; making sure they see and hear the good, so they conclude we're pious people. But Jesus isn't fooled by outward appearances. He sees past that front to the sins we keep hidden from others. He knows all of the sins that happen in our hearts. Even when what we're doing or saying seems good, Jesus sees the truth that it isn't perfect – that the best of our efforts are still sins we should be punished for – that we are spiritual beggars who bring nothing to the table.

But, Isaiah says, it's for such **poor** and **needy** sinners that the Root of Jesse came. Not to render a guilty verdict; but to win us a righteous verdict. Yes, **righteousness and faithfulness** were the belt and sash that Jesus wore every day of his life. Not just on the outside, but on the inside, too; a life so perfect that God's spoken verdict from heaven was, "I am well-pleased." He took the poverty of our sin and was judged guilty and punished in our place on the cross, and has made you rich with his righteousness – wrapping it around you like a sash. So that God says of you, too: "Well-pleased."

The root of Jesse gives you rest in his righteousness. Isaiah says, ¹⁰ **In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.** The risen Jesus stands like a banner, a rallying point for all nations, saying, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

In these busy days before Christmas, let Jesus give your soul rest. Rally to him in his word, as you are now, to hear the simple truth: "Your sins are forgiven." To rejoice in the fact that you are at peace with God. To know again that God is no longer angry with you; for Jesus' sake, he still says of you, "Well-pleased." To have the burden of guilt lifted from you once more and find rest for your souls.

And look forward to the even more glorious rest the root of Jesse will give you. It's interesting – in the Old Testament, God records how King David beat all of Israel's enemies in battle. The result? God says, "Israel had rest on every side." King Jesus did something far greater. He beat sin, death, and the devil for us and won us an eternal resting place. Where the devil will no longer tempt, sin will never happen again, and death won't touch us. Where all of the problems and pains and worries of life will be a thing of the past. Where we'll dwell in perfect peace and safety forever.

What a glorious rest! Come quickly, Root of Jesse, and grant it. Amen.