

Live Like a Shining Star  
Sermon for the Last Sunday of the Church Year  
Sermon Text: Daniel 12:1-3



*“At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. <sup>2</sup>And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup>And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”*

The well-known song, *“Whoever Lets the Good Lord Rule,”* points to two realities. One is the feeling of threat and danger, the other is the belief that, despite appearances, God holds everything securely in His hands. *“Be still and rejoice at the grace of God.”* The book of Daniel deals with precisely these two aspects. It was written when Daniel and his people were led into captivity by the Babylonians. This meant that they couldn’t enter the temple and were therefore separated from God. Despite the difficult situation, the Israelites did well, especially Daniel. He not only experienced the rule of the Babylonians, but also Persian king Cyrus’ victory over the Babylonians. Daniel eventually worked his way up to the king’s court and became part of the ruling class. Nevertheless, Daniel had to experience what it was like to live among people who did not believe in God. Some of his enemies persuaded the king to issue a decree stating that only the king was to be worshipped and no one else, including the God of Israel. How did Daniel react to this? He did nothing different. In other words, he continued to pray to God. As a result, he was thrown into the lions’ den, but God protected him there too. When the worried king looked into the pit – because he cared for Daniel despite everything – he found Daniel unharmed among the lions. The story of Daniel also teaches us three things today: 1) In emergency situations, it is not self-confidence that helps us but God-consciousness, 2) we know where we are going, 3) God is with us in death and in life.

In the verses we read today from the book of Daniel, he speaks of a great tribulation that will come upon all people. We can understand what this means because many of our contemporaries experienced the Second World War, had to flee or suffer the consequences of that war in Communist East Germany. Others have experienced great hardship in Iran or Afghanistan and have had to leave their country, family, and everything they hold dear. Still others have experienced great grief because a beloved family member has passed away. Death always comes far too quickly, and there are regrets about the things you would have wanted to say, but the opportunity has been lost forever. In such situations, our hearts are empty and hopeless. The Bible does not try to hide this grief and desolation but speaks openly about it. Daniel also had to experience this. Nevertheless, he knew that what was happening in this world was framed by another reality. And this reality is that God reigns over everything. Hidden from our eyes is the great archangel Michael, who fights against our enemies on God’s behalf. Daniel’s vision thus shows us that both the people of God, the Israelites, and each and every one of us do not stand alone. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers. And it was precisely against these powers that God was victorious. Being aware of this, Daniel was able to simply continue praying to God despite the king’s prohibition. With this awareness, he also went confidently into the lions’ den, because he knew that God is never far away, even in tribulation, and that God has counted every hair on Daniel’s head. What does this mean for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In the numerous places of war in our world, we see that large numbers of people are simply wiped off the face of the

earth. On the other hand, computer development has progressed so that humans can be increasingly replaced by computers. Therefore, the question becomes more and more pressing for us: What is a human being anyway? And what is their value? Here we can learn from the prophet Daniel. Daniel had no self-awareness, but he had an awareness of God. He knew that God had called him and knew him. This gave him confidence in tribulation. We are baptized in the name of Jesus, that is our identity. Baptism is the truth that stands above all other truths. This is precisely why we do not allow the events of our world to darken our future. It is true that man is like grass. It is also true that humans can be replaced by computers. But what counts is not self-awareness or human awareness, but God-awareness.

Because God reigns not only in this world but in that world, Daniel's eyes were opened to God in the distant future. The future that Daniel talks about is life after death. Daniel speaks openly of a double resurrection: the one to damnation and the other to eternal life. Daniel warns us not to neglect this future. We are on the way to God and at the same time, on the way to eternal judgment. This thought not only presents us with a challenge, but also overwhelms us. Because we are clearly dealing with something that is beyond our strength. Perhaps this is the reason why death is suppressed, according to the motto: "Out of sight, out of mind." The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus tried to banish death completely from life by saying: "Death is nothing to me." His reasoning was: "As long as we are here, death is not here. And when death is there, we are not there." Many people think like Epicurus. Because there is nothing after death, they don't care what comes next. So they mainly try to find their way in the here and now, as eternity is either far away or has nothing to do with this life. God speaks a different language. Daniel announced it and Jesus put it into practice. After death, there is life with God and life without God. Life without God means that we also live without God in the afterlife.

God is therefore the absolute key between death and life. This is why the prophet Daniel learned not to trust in his own strength, but in God's strength. In this way, he also experienced comfort and encouragement from God in this life. Similar to the apostle Paul, who, in constant fear for his life, said: "Now it is not I who live, but Christ in me!" The resurrection of Jesus struck the present time like a thunderbolt and changed people's lives, and it is always accompanied by great joy. But what is the real reason for the joy of the resurrection? Is it simply the fact that life does not end? Given the many sufferings in this world, eternal life under these conditions could perhaps be more of an eternal torment. However, eternity is not comparable to an infinitely long period of time but stands for life in abundance. Abundance here does not mean quantity, but quality. Since God Himself is life, He can give life to all created things. There is no life outside of God, and it is precisely this life that Jesus gives us with His resurrection. The return to the story of Daniel in the lions' den shows that Daniel was confident despite the threat because he knew life in God. Whether his physical body would be devoured by lions or not was no longer relevant, because he was with God. This faith of Daniel gives us comfort, hope, and encouragement. Through His resurrection, Jesus united us with God. Now we can be in Christ, and He in us. This means that we are a new creature and that our lives are henceforth determined and defined by God. Daniel in the lions' den was not spared life-threatening situations, but it was among the lions that he experienced what it means that God is near. Today, on Eternity Sunday, death is present in our lives when we think of the deceased or reflect on dangerous situations. Our Persian members will therefore place candles on the altar in memory of their loved ones who have died in prisons. Death thus intrudes into life. But life through Jesus doesn't just move into the domain of death, it overcomes it. Jesus is therefore never far away. Just as God was in the midst of the lions with Daniel, Jesus is also among us today. His resurrection confirms our own resurrection. We cannot say exactly what life will be like then, but one thing is certain: life in Christ begins now. Even our normal times, which are often difficult, are framed by God and His love. And so, despite some bad things, we will be like shining stars here and for all eternity. Amen.