

LWML-Canada Sunday 2010
DIVINE SERVICE
SHINE LIKE STARS ... in your community of faith

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is Lutheran Women’s Missionary League–Canada Sunday, the day chosen to remember and promote the mission work they do.

The theme for this year’s LWML–Canada Sunday is *Shine Like Stars ... in your community of faith*, based on Daniel 12:3, which says, “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 (ESV).”

How fitting that they have chosen this theme at a time when worship attendance in most Christian congregations in Canada is declining. At a time when Sunday school and Bible study involvement and attendance is waning. At a time when it is difficult to find members willing to let their name stand for and hold office in the congregation and its auxiliary organizations. And at a time that it is politically correct in our Canadian government and schools to give credence to and encourage all other religions except Christianity.

In the midst of a time like this, or one that was even worse, Daniel was given a vision of final victory in the end time when Jesus returns and takes believers to heaven where they would “shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

Most of you will remember the Sunday school lesson about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. One Sunday school child called it the lesson about Shadrach, Meshach and To-bed-we-go. Those who remember the story will recall how these three men were thrown into the furnace because they worshipped only the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and refused to bow down and worship the gods of Nebuchadnezzar. And you will recall how Jesus appeared with them in the furnace, protected and saved them. You will also remember how Daniel was cast into the lion's den for the same reason and how an angel saved him and kept the lions from devouring him.

That's the way it was in Daniel's time and it's that way in some countries today. Despite the negativism in Canada toward Christians, we still do not yet suffer that kind of persecution. We thank God for that. And we thank God for the vision He gave to Daniel, a vision that shows us there is a way for us to appear with the faithful around God's throne in Heaven and *shine like stars* forever and ever. There is a way to know we will be victorious in our faith.

At the end of Chapter 12 Daniel says, “⁸I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" ⁹He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰ Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall

understand, but those who are wise shall understand...¹³ But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days."

Notice that Daniel is told that the wise, who are many, shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined. That is how to *shine like stars* now and to know that we will, in the end, wind up with Daniel *shining like stars* before God's throne in heaven.

Jesus is the "Light of the World that shines in the darkness" of our world. He has paid the price for, and given to us, His "Word and Sacraments" for the forgiveness of our sins (that is to purify us from sin), when we have failed to *shine like stars*. When we recall the Easter account of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, we also recall that Jesus told all of the disciples that they would deny him and they did. They needed Jesus' forgiveness and so do we when we fail to *shine like stars* and deny Jesus, especially in our own congregation, district and synod.

Among the many passages telling us how to "Shine Like Stars in Our Community of Faith," there are two that really highlight how we are to do that.

The first is Hebrews 10:19-27 which tells us:

"¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. ²⁶For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."

That passage was a blinding one to me the first time I read it, especially the part that says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." That is how we keep the third commandment (Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy) and *shine like stars* every Sunday we are faithful, every time we participate in Bible study and every time we serve in other ways.

The second passage is Matthew 18:15:

¹⁵"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

This passage is very similar to what God spoke to Ezekiel in Chapter 33 when He said:

⁷ "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸ When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ⁹ But if

you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.

Jesus is the brightest star and shows us the way to be His Stars. He gave His life for us on the cross so that through His Word and Sacraments He could enter our life and make us His Stars to shine on each other and to encourage each other.

We can learn a great deal about *shining like stars* from light. Did you know that most of the time light is invisible? Because of its nature there are only two times you can see light. The first is when you are looking at the source (like looking at the sun which is our closest star). The second is when you are looking at its reflection off another object (like looking at the moon).

(You can demonstrate this by using a powerful flashlight or a laser light and show how light is invisible between the source and the reflection off an object.)

The brightness of the light is dependent on how close we are to the source. The further we are from the source, the dimmer the light (like some of the stars which are larger than our sun but are so far away from us).

From this we can see that to *shine like stars* we need to look at and be close to Jesus who is the author and source of our faith. Second, every time we hear God's Word and use Baptism and the Lord's Supper, our faith is renewed and we shine brighter, empowering us to shine like Jesus.

Today we thank Jesus for the faithful members of LWML–Canada who shine among us with their "Mites," their grants to mission projects and their work in each of our congregations.

And most of all, we thank Jesus for His vision to Daniel showing us that we can look forward to *shining like stars* forever before God's heavenly throne as Jesus shines in each one of our lives now and forever.

Shine Jesus shine! Amen.