

The Story of Saint Lucia

We know little of the history of St. Lucia (or St. Lucy), but we believe that she lived in Sicily, Italy, in the 4th century, during the persecution of Christians by Emperor Diocletian. One account of her life states that her mother became ill, so Lucia prayed for her, and after God answered her prayers and healed her mother, Lucia gave her dowery (the money meant to pay for her wedding) to the poor and dedicated her life to God. However, a non-Christian man who wanted to marry her would not accept her decision and betrayed her to the Emperor, whose soldiers threw her in prison. Traditionally, the story says that the Emperor's torturers attacked Lucia's eyes as a punishment for her Christianity. For this reason, she is often depicted in art as carrying eyes on a dish and is considered the patroness of people suffering from eye problems. St. Lucia was probably offered her freedom if she abandoned Christianity, but she chose to remain faithful. So she became a martyr for Christ and left her earthly life to join her King of Kings in His heavenly court.

In many countries around the world St. Lucia's feast-day, December 13, is a time of celebration. In the Swedish celebration known as "Luciadagen," on that day the eldest girl in each household wakes up early in the morning, dresses in a white gown with a red sash, and puts on a crown of lingonberry leaves and candles (according to some traditions, seven candles, and to others, four, five, or nine). She serves her family hot coffee, *Lussekatter* (saffron buns), and ginger cookies. The other children follow her in a procession, the girls dressed in white and carrying candles and the boys dressed as "Star Boys," and wearing pointed hats covered in stars. Although we do not know how St. Lucia, an Italian saint, came to be so beloved by the people of Sweden and other Nordic regions (her story may have been carried from Italy to Sweden by Vikings, traders, or missionaries), she has become a symbol of light and hope; her crown of light and greenery represents new life, even amid the Winter Solstice.

Many stories are told about St. Lucia. In one story, she arrived in Syracuse harbor in 1582 with a ship full of wheat to feed the starving townsfolk, who had prayed for her intercession. A similar story is told in Sweden of a time in the middle ages when she arrived in a ship on Lake Vänern, bringing fresh wheat to support the people during the hard winter months (this is why wheat porridge is often eaten to honor St. Lucia!). The stories say that on these occasions Lucia's face was so radiant that a halo of light encircled her head. May we follow her example of faith and humble service to others so that we may join her someday in heaven! St. Lucia, please pray for us!



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