



### ***Santa Lucia, Ljusklara Hägring***

Lucy's feast comes during Advent. Her feast originally coincided with the Winter Solstice, the shortest day of the year before calendar reforms, so her feastday has become a festival of light.

This is particularly seen the in Scandinavian countries, with their long dark winters. There, a young girl dressed in a white dress and a red sash (as the symbol of martyrdom) carries palms and wears a crown or wreath of candles on her head. In Sweden, girls dressed as Lucy carry rolls and cookies in procession as songs are sung. It is said in Sweden that to vividly celebrate St. Lucy's Day will help one live the long winter days with enough light.

Saint Lucia is one of the few saints celebrated by the overwhelmingly Lutheran Nordic people — Danes; Swedes; Finns and Norwegians. The St. Lucy's Day celebrations retain many indigenous Germanic pagan, pre-Christian midwinter elements. Some of the practices associated with the day predate the adoption of Christianity in Scandinavia, and like much of Scandinavian folklore and even religiosity, is centered on the annual struggle between light and darkness.

The Nordic observation of St. Lucy is first attested in the Middle Ages, and continued after the Protestant Reformation in the 1520s and 1530s, although the modern celebration is only about 200 years old. It is likely that tradition owes its popularity in the Nordic countries to the extreme change in daylight hours between the seasons in this region.

The pre-Christian holiday of Yule, or *jól*, was the most important holiday in Scandinavia and Northern Europe. Originally the observance of the winter solstice, and the rebirth of the sun, it



brought about many practices that remain in the Advent and Christmas celebrations today. The Yule season was a time for feasting, drinking, gift-giving, and gatherings, but also the season of awareness and fear of the forces of the dark

In Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Norway, "Santa Lucia" has been given various lyrics to accommodate it to the winter-light festival of Saint Lucy, at the darkest time of the year. The three most famous lyrics versions in Swedish are *Luciasången*, aka *Sankta Lucia*, *Ijusklara hägring* ("Saint Lucy, bright illusion"), *Natten går tunga fjät* ("The night walks with heavy steps") and the 1970s "Kindergarten" version *Ute är mörkt och kallt* ("Outside it's dark and cold"). The more common Norwegian version is *Svart senker natten seg* ("Black the night descends").

The song was also recorded by Elvis Presley on the 1965 album *Elvis for Everyone*

**Lucia of Syracuse** (283–304), also known as **Saint Lucy**, or **Saint Lucia** (Italian *Santa Lucia*), was a young Christian martyr who died during the Diocletianic Persecution. She is venerated as a saint by the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Orthodox Churches. She is one of seven women, apart from the Blessed Virgin Mary, commemorated by name in the Canon of the Mass. Her feast day, known as Saint Lucy's Day, is celebrated in the West on 13 December. St. Lucia of Syracuse was honored in the middle ages and remained a well-known saint in early modern England