

December 13 is not just a date in Sweden. **It is Lucia Day.**

Traditions define a country and Sweden has many traditions. Lucia is one of the most cherished and for us to be able to share this beautiful tradition with you today is very special.

Lucia is widely celebrated in Sweden – with families at home, at work, in schools, hospitals and on TV. It is not just celebrated in Sweden, if you find a Swede somewhere on the globe you can be sure there will be a Lucia celebration. Early in the morning, Lucia and her choir come, Lucia dressed in a long white dress with a **red sash** around her waist and a **crown of flickering candles on her head, bringing coffee, saffronbuns and ginger snaps**. Except the choir, you often see Star boys at the end of the procession. **The star symbolizing the star over Bethlehem.**

Also the Nobel Laureates in Stockholm will wake up in the morning of December 10, by Lucia and her choir singing and serving “Lussekatte” and “Pepparkakor”.

Very much appreciated!

Why do we have this tradition?

Long ago before Christianity arrived in Sweden, and December 13 was thought to be the darkest day of the year, there were pagan rituals of lighting bonfires and lights on this darkest day of the year, to dispel darkness and evil, and to call for the sun to return. But pagan rituals were forbidden when Christianity arrived so one can assume that to continue the rituals to dispel darkness and evil, celebrating a christian Saint, like Lucia was widely acceptable to all.

Who was Lucia?

And why a crown of lighted candles on her head and a red satin band on her waist?

Lucia was a young woman in Syracuse, Sicily who lived a long time ago in the 300s. She was engaged to a wealthy Roman, but just before her wedding was to take place, she became a Christian.

So intense was her faith that she decided against marriage and vowed to give away her dowry and spend the rest of her life helping the poor and needy. Her fiancé turned against her and accused her of witchcraft and she was burned at stake on December 13, the year of 304. Later she was canonized and became known as Saint Lucia, “the Saint of light and hope” as she was said to have gone to the catacombs of Rome to bring food and hope to the Christians confined there. In order to see her way down the stairs and use her hands to carry food, she placed a **crown of lighted candles on her head**.

When they built and lit the fire around her, the flames didn't consume her but eventually she died. To make sure of it, one of the soldiers took a sword and cut open the side - **the symbolism of the red band around the waist**.

And who would be better than Lucia, **the Saint of Light and Hope**, to commemorate the uncertain times we live in today to bring **Peace and Joy** to all of us! Let us forget the outside world for a moment and enjoy the Lucia Day and listen to the beautiful choir.

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