

**Collect For the Season of Advent: Almighty God, heavenly Father, bestow on us Your grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which Your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility, that in the Last Day when He will come again in His glorious Majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may then rise to the life immortal; through Him who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**

**SAINT LUCY, MARTYR, 302 A.D.**

Lucia was a rich, young Christian of Greek ancestry. Raised in a pious family, she vowed her life to Christ. Her Roman father died when she was young. Her mother, Eutychia, arranged a marriage for her. For three years she managed to keep the marriage on hold. To change the mother's mind about the girl's new faith, Lucy prayed at the tomb of Saint Agatha, and her mother's long hemorrhagic illness was cured. Her mother agreed with Lucy's desire to live for God, and Lucy became known as a patron of those with maladies like her mother's.

Her rejected pagan bridegroom, Paschasius, denounced Lucy as a Christian to the governor of Sicily. The governor sentenced her to forced prostitution, but when guards went to fetch her, they could not move her even when they hitched her to a team of oxen. The governor ordered her killed instead. After torture that included having her eyes torn out, she was surrounded by bundles of wood which were set afire; they went out. She prophesied against her persecutors, and was executed by being stabbed to death with a dagger.

Legend says her eyesight was restored before her death. This and the meaning of her name led to her connection with eyes, the blind, eye trouble, etc.

*The Text*

### **John 3:17-21**

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup>Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. <sup>19</sup>And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup>For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. <sup>21</sup>But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God."

### *The Sermon*

Throughout Sweden, the Feast Day of Saint Lucia – or St. Lucy – is celebrated as a festival of light. In the early hours of December 13, a young woman dressed in a white gown and wearing a red sash and a crown – a crown of lingonberry twigs and blazing candles – would go from one farm to the next – carrying a torch to light her way – bringing baked goods. Every village had its own Lucia. The custom still persists in Sweden – although the crowns – like modern Christmas trees – use electric lights.

In Norway and Sweden – it is still a custom on December 13 – for a girl in a white dress – representing St. Lucy – to bring a tray of saffron buns and ginger biscuits and butter cookies and steaming coffee – to wake the family. I've included some of those recipes in your bulletin so that you can see what these traditional Lucy foods were and perhaps even make some of them yourselves. Today, many families have a Lucia-Queen in their own home – often the youngest daughter – who wakes the rest of the family with song and baked goods.

So who was this St. Lucy – whom these young maidens now portray and symbolize? Who was the real Lucia? Saint Lucia was a young girl who died a grizzly death. Lucy was beheaded. A sharp sword severed her head from her body and her blood flowed red – hence the red paraments today on the altar and the red sash worn by the girls of Scandinavia on this day. Lucia died by beheading during a severe persecution waged by the cruel Roman Emperor Diocletian. Lucy lived and died at Catania on the island of Sicily.

Her body was later brought to the new capital of the Roman Empire named after the first Christian emperor – Constantine. The city formerly named Byzantium became Constantinople – and there St. Lucia’s remains were laid to rest. But her mortal remains were moved once again as Constantinople fell to the Moslems in 1453 and was renamed Istanbul. So St. Lucy’s body was removed to Venice in Italy – where she now rests in the church of Santa Lucia. Her day is a true feast of celebration and festivity during the fast of Advent – because – for Sweden and Norway and Denmark – she is the great “light” saint – who turns the tide of a long winter and brings the light of day.

See – before the calendar reform – this day of her martyrdom happened to fall on the shortest day of the year. In the Julian calendar – devised by Julius Caesar and used into the Middle Ages – the winter solstice was December 13<sup>th</sup> – rather than December 21<sup>st</sup>. That only changed with the Gregorian calendar in the 1300’s. The British Empire and her colonies retained the Julian calendar in some places even into the 1700’s – which is why when I was young – we had to learn two birthdates for George Washington – one Julian – and the other Gregorian. So on St. Lucy’s Day – the sun would return again – and the days became longer. “Lucy fires” used to be burned in northern Europe – and people would throw incense into the fire to celebrate the changing of the sun’s course.

St. Lucy’s Day therefore is about the victory of the sun and warmth over the cold and the dark. It is not surprising then – that the people of Scandinavia were fascinated by St. Lucy – and adopted her as their very own – a saint who came bearing hope and light.

In the Gospel appointed for St. Lucy’s Day – Jesus says to Nicodemus: *“This is why people are condemned: The light came into the world. Yet – people loved the dark – rather than the light – because their actions were evil. People who do what is wrong – hate the light and don’t come to the light. They don’t want their actions to be exposed. But people who do what is true – come to the light – so that the things they do for God may be clearly seen.”* (John 3:19-21).

It is Advent – my brothers and sisters. And it takes self-discipline to keep Advent. The commercial and secular forces that pressure us to celebrate Christmas in Advent can be distracting. And we live with other Christian communities that do not keep an Advent season as a time of spiritual preparation and repentance – and so they get caught up in celebrating

Christmas. We as Lutherans must be **in** the world – but not **of** the world – as Jesus said.

Let us keep Advent in the spirit in which it was meant to be kept – in the ancient spirituality of the Holy Church. We are to set our minds on things above – as St. Lucy did – on Him who is *“God of God – Light of Light – Very God of Very God – begotten – not made – being of one substance with the Father – by whom all things were made – who for us men – and for our salvation – came down from heaven – and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary – and was made Man.”*

We ponder God’s love for us – in coming into our world as **one of us** – as Emmanuel – “God With Us.” We are called in Advent – to *“cast away the works of darkness – and put upon us the armor of light – not tomorrow – not next week – not next month or next year – but **now** in the time of this mortal life – in which our Lord Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility.”*

That is of course a poetic way of saying – we are to examine our lives – and cast aside – by repentance – those things in our lives – that exclude the Lord from the central place. Advent is a season to offer ourselves anew to our Savior-God – as St. Lucy did – and to wait quietly – for the Coming of our Lord.

To our preparation – we add prayers for all sorts and conditions of men and women in this world – a world so filled with darkness – a world so filled with violence – and sorrow – and cold despair. We help to meet the needs of others less fortunate than ourselves – as did St. Lucy – and we do it by serving and giving of ourselves and of our time.

So let us come together as a parish of God’s People on this holy day – and in this blessed season of Advent – to celebrate the God of Light and Love – the Prince of Peace who conquered the Prince of Darkness – the King who came – the King who is coming still – and the King who will come again to judge every human being. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

## Recipes for St. Lucy Day

### Ginger Biscuits

4 oz of butter  
7 oz of sugar  
1 tablespoon of golden syrup  
1 egg  
8 oz of flour  
1 teaspoon of baking powder  
3 teaspoons of ground ginger  
2 teaspoons of mixed spice  
½ teaspoon of baking soda

Preheat oven to 180°C, 350°F.

In a large bowl cream together the butter and sugar, add the golden syrup and the egg. Mix thoroughly. Add the flour, baking powder, ginger, spice and baking soda and mix until well combined. Roll into small balls, and place on lined baking tray allowing room to spread. Do not flatten! Bake for 15 minutes.

(Makes 36)

### Danish Butter Cookies

¾ cup butter, softened  
1 cup granulated sugar  
2 large eggs  
1 teaspoon lemon juice  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
2 ½ cups all-purpose flour

Put butter and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Beat with an electric mixer on medium speed 3 to 4 minutes, or until well mixed. Add eggs, one at a time, beating after every addition. Add lemon juice and vanilla; mix well. Add flour; mix well. Using a pastry bag, squeeze dough (1 ½ inches in diameter) onto an ungreased cookie sheet.

Bake in a preheated 350°F oven 12 to 15 minutes, or until light brown.

Makes 3 ½ dozen cookies.