

Saint for December 12 – Lucy, 283-304

*Observed 13 December*



Lucy (in Latin, Lucia) was a young Christian woman in early fourth century Sicily who was martyred during the infamous Diocletian persecution. Her martyrdom inspired Christians throughout the empire and stories quickly collected to fill in the details of her life and death. According to tradition, Lucy dedicated her virginity to God and refused marriage to a pagan man, which her mother had arranged. Her angry suitor denounced her to the local governor, who sentenced her to be forced into prostitution. God protected her from this fate by making her immovable. When she could not be moved, the governor ordered her burned. The executioner tried to burn her, but she was immune to the fire. She was finally killed by a sword through the throat. Traditions vary as to whether she ripped out her own eyes (because they attracted the admiration of her suitor) or the guards poked them out. Whichever happened, the loss of her eyes made her the patron saint of the blind and those afflicted with eye diseases.

Lucy was one of the first saints to be venerated by the church and she remains one of the most widely celebrated, among Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Orthodox, and Lutherans. Her name derives from the Latin word for light and the day of her feast used to coincide with the winter solstice, the darkest day of the year. Many earlier pagan midwinter practices were folded into the celebrations of this early saint who embodies the light-giving love of Christ which dispels all darkness from human life.

Saint Lucy's feast is a popular celebration in Scandinavian, Baltic, and Balkan countries, and in the communities of their descendants in North America. The best known celebrations (particularly in Swedish communities) center around a procession led by a young girl acting as Saint Lucy, wearing a crown of lit candles, representing the fire which refused to consume the saint at her execution.

*Lessons* Song of Solomon 6:1-9, Psalm 131, Revelation 19:5-8, John 1:9-13

*Collect* Loving God, for the salvation of all you gave Jesus Christ as light to a world in darkness: Illumine us, with your daughter Lucy, with the light of Christ, that by the merits of his passion we may be led to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.