



Sons of Norway
HERITAGE PROGRAMS



MiniPresentation4

LUCIA

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Up to the 1700s, the night of December thirteenth was considered the longest night of the year. This, along with the darkness of the Norwegian winter, made this night a dangerous one in the minds of the superstitious old-time Norwegian society. It was called “Lussi night”, and trolls and netherworld people were said to be out from this night on until Christmas, led by a troll-woman called Lussi. She checked that everybody so far had done their Christmas preparations properly, and that nobody worked on the night of the thirteenth.

If someone did, she tore down the chimney and destroyed what she could. Most people preferred to stay indoors when Lussi was out, fearing that they might be abducted by her sinister followers. Naughty children had to be especially well-guarded; if not, Lussi would take them.

In modern times, December 13th still is special in Norway, but not because of the frightening Lussi. Norwegians have adopted the Swedish custom of celebrating St. Lucy. Lussi and Lucy, their names might sound very much alike, but they stand for something totally different. The Norwegian Lussi represents the evil and dark forces, and the Swedish St. Lucy the good.

St. Lucy was a young Christian woman living in Sicily in the 200s at a time when Christians were persecuted as traitors to the Roman Empire. She chose to give away her dowry to the poor, and her fiancé was so infuriated by this that he informed the Roman officials about her faith. She was sentenced to suffer death at the stake, but at the execution she was not hurt by the flames. In desperation, the executioner cut her throat.

After Lucy’s death, there were several reports of her bringing light and comfort to the poor, so she was made a saint by the Catholic Church in the 500s. Her name, Lucy, is derived from the Latin word lux, which means light, and St. Lucy has become the symbol of light. Her day is December 13th and through the centuries she has been celebrated in various ways throughout the North. Today the Swedish Lucy-traditions are the best known. In many Swedish families, a young girl dresses in a long, white gown early in the morning of December 13th. Wearing a crown of light on her head and singing the traditional St. Lucy song, she brings food and drink to the rest of the household.

In Norway the St. Lucy celebrations are not common in private homes, but have been adapted to larger ceremonies in schools, institutions and at community events. Light processions are common. Girls dressed in white and with a light crown, along with attendants carrying candles, add luster to an otherwise dark winter day and to the many pre-Christmas events that are going on all over the country. In many cities and towns, Lucy, the bearer of light, is the one who lights the Christmas tree.

She also lights the spirit of Christmas in people’s hearts and prepares them for the holidays.