

Sweden



St. Lucia was a young Christian girl who was martyred in 304AD. The most common story told about St. Lucia is that she would secretly bring food to the persecuted Christians in Rome, who lived in hiding in the catacombs under the city. She would wear candles on her head so she had both her hands free to carry things. Lucy means “light.”

Christmas begins in Sweden with the Saint Lucia ceremony. Before dawn on the morning of December 13th, the youngest daughter from each family puts on a white robe with a red sash. She wears a crown of **Lingonberry evergreen** branches with tall-lighted candles attached to it. She wakes her parents, and serves them with coffee and Lucia buns. The other children accompany her. The boys dressed as **star boys** in long white shirts and pointed hats.

On **Julafton** (Christmas Eve) Swedish people move in procession to the church with lighted candles in hand. At home, mothers lights the candles on Christmas Eve. Christmas trees are set up in Sweden two days before Christmas and are decorated with candles, apples, straw ornaments, Swedish flags and small gnomes wearing red tasseled caps.

Christmas trees are usually brought into Swedish homes one or two days before Christmas. Decorations include: candles, apples, Swedish flags, small gnomes and tasseled caps, and straw ornaments. The house may be filled with red tulips and the smell of **pepparkakor** (a heart-shaped star, or goat-shaped gingerbread biscuits).



In Sweden on Christmas Eve, people eat a large buffet, or **julbord**. The first course is made up of cold fish such as herring, **gravlax** (salmon which has been cured in sugar, salt and dill) and smoked salmon. The fish course is normally eaten with some bread and butter.

This is followed by cold meats including turkey, roast beef and **julskinka** (a Christmas ham). These are eaten with cheeses, liver pate, salads and pickles. Again, these are eaten with different types of bread and butter or mayonnaise.

Next there might be meatballs, **prinskorv** (sausages), **koldomar** (meat stuffed cabbage rolls), jellied pigs' feet, **lutfisk** (a dried cod served with a thick white

sauce) and **revbenspjäll** (oven-roasted pork ribs). These are served with red cabbage and **Janssons Frestelse** (matchstick potatoes layered with cream, onion and anchovies that is baked to a golden brown. There's also **dopp i grytan** which is bread that is dipped in the broth and juices that are left over after boiling the ham.

For dessert there is pudding, **risgrynsgröt** or a selection of sweet pastries, some more pepparkakor biscuits and some home made sweets! Risgryngröt, a special rice porridge, has an almond hidden inside. The person who finds the almond in his or her bowl will marry in the coming year.



After Christmas Eve dinner, a friend or family member dresses up as **Tomte** (Christmas gnome much like Santa). Tomte is supposed to live under the floorboards of the house or barn and ride a straw goat. Tomte, wearing a white beard and dressed in red robes, distributes gifts from his sack. Many are given with funny rhyme that hints at the contents. **Jultomten**, (a little brownie) helps

Tomte/Santa Claus give gifts to the children who have been good.

In the predawn darkness of Christmas morning, churches are lit up entirely by candles for the Christmas service. Candles illuminate in every house window. Bells ring out, calling families to churches lit by candlelight. Back home again, the parents kindle a blaze in the fireplace to light the darkness. The following day is **Second Day Christmas**, a day of singing carols.

On January 5, the eve of **Twelfth Night**, or Epiphany, young boys dress up as the Wise Men and carry a lighted candle on a pole topped with a star. These boys go from house to house singing carols.

Then, on **St. Knut's Day** on January 13, there is one last Christmas party. The grown-ups pack away the Christmas decorations while the costumed children eat the last of the wrapped candies left on the tree. Then out goes the tree to the tune of the last song of Christmas. In Swedish Happy/Merry Christmas is "**God Jul.**"

Resources:

Australian Media Pty. Santa's Net. "Christmas in Sweden". <http://www.santas.net/swedishchristmas.htm>

Christmas World. "Christmas Around the World: Christmas in Sweden". <http://www.worldofchristmas.net/christmas-world/sweden.html>

The North Pole. Christmas Around the World. "Christmas in Sweden". <http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/sweden.html>

Why Christmas? "Christmas in Sweden". <http://whychristmas.com/cultures/sweden.shtml>