



**The 2018 Sankta Lucia court and star boys.**

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Christmas Tree. The Lower Columbia Danish Society will serve Scandinavian treats.

For nearly two millennia, this tradition has continued, inspired by an early Christian martyr, whose name, Lucia, is a variation of the Latin word “lux,” or “light.” Lucia was born on the island of Sicily during the Roman reign of the Emperor Diocletian, who oversaw the bloodiest persecution of Christians. Diocletian ordered the Christian scriptures be burned, their places of worship razed and the people put to death. Lucia brought food and aid to hungry believers hiding in catacombs from their persecutors.

Wishing to free her hands to carry as much food as possible, she cleverly bound a candle wreath upon her head to light her way.

Later, to escape an unwanted marriage, Lucia insisted her dowry be donated to the poor. Her incensed fiancé publicly accused her of being a Christian and attempted to burn her at the stake in 310 AD, but the fire would not harm her, necessitating the use of a sword. Missionaries carried the story of Lucia’s martyrdom to Sweden, where emigrants, in turn, shared it across the world. Today, Saint Lucia’s day is celebrated in Italy, Venezuela, Estonia, Scandinavia and on the Caribbean island that bears her name. Typically observed on the winter solstice (on the Julian calendar), in Sweden, Lucia may carry saffron buns or ginger cookies. Candles are lit and electric sources are dimmed in anticipation of the light she will bring.

There is some evidence the roots of the festival may reach back much further to pagan midwinter Yule traditions when it was said, on the darkest night of the year, spirits, gnomes and trolls roamed the earth while farm animals spoke with one other. Many aspects of the tradition



**Dancing around the Christmas tree at the festival.**

reflect the annual struggle between light and darkness.

For years, the festival was primarily celebrated in Sweden, but during World War II, while the populace endured a darkness far deeper than the absence of light alone, the tradition soared in popularity, spreading to Denmark, Finland and Norway. Threatened with German occupation, the holiday became a passive protest for survivors clinging to the promise that darkness might be overcome by the power of light, warm bread and tolerance.

The Sankta Lucia Festival is open to the public, and all are invited to celebrate the Scandinavian tradition that is sure to fill your evening with the light of the holiday season.



**Astoria’s accordion band, ‘The Polka Dots.’**

### **If You Go**

Sankta Lucia Festival of Lights

7 p.m Friday

Astoria High School Auditorium, 1001 W Marine Drive

\$1 per person, \$5 per family

Admission supports scholarships to qualifying high school seniors throughout Clatsop County.