Opinion
NCR Voices



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In my corner of northern New Jersey, the days have been cold and the evenings even colder. Each night I find myself astonished that the nights are still growing darker. This time of year it's easy to give into despair. To stay the darkness, I turn off the "big light" and instead turn on as many small, warm lights as possible. I also try to keep my oven roaring.

Many of the best holiday traditions happen in the kitchen, perhaps as a defiant warmth radiating in the dark. The food tradition related to St. Lucy, a 4th-century martyr called St. Lucia in Scandinavian countries, involves St. Lucia buns.

St. Lucy, whose feast day is Dec. 13, is known as a bringer of light. Lucy is said to have brought food to Christians hiding in the Roman catacombs and that she entered the caves wearing a crown of candles atop her head to ensure that her hands were free to carry as many supplies as she physically could.

St. Lucy's Day is primarily celebrated in Norway, Sweden and Denmark, though many other countries celebrate her feast day with their own unique traditions.

The day is often marked with processions of children dressed in white gowns and red sashes along with crowns of evergreens around their heads.

The costumed children deliver a special pastry called lussekatter, to their parents and elders. The S-shaped, saffron cardamom buns are often served with mulled wine, coffee or tea. The idea is to reflect the generosity of St. Lucy in the

catacombs.

I tried Atlas Obscura's recipe for lussekatter, grinding threads of saffron and infusing them into butter.



Olivia Bardo tried Atlas Obscura's recipe for lussekatter, grinding threads of saffron and infusing them into butter. (NCR photo/Olivia Bardo)

Lussekatter is set aside for the darkest moments of the year.

St. Lucy is beloved, particularly in a region of the world where the sun rarely appears and wintertime darkness seems unending. These little Lucias, handing out pastries and a warm drink, offer a kind of hope that the darkness will not last.

A similar resistance to darkness happens right here in our communities and in our kitchens. As the popular song "Sankta Lucia" says: "Darkness shall take flight soon, / From earth's valleys. / So she speaks / Wonderful words to us: / A new day will rise

again."

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