

Wed. of Gaudete
(St. Lucy)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
December 14, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Yesterday, December 13, was St. Lucy day. The name “Lucy,” or “Lucia” comes from the Latin word for “light.” In the northern hemisphere, this day of light falls on one of the darkest days of the year as we approach the winter solstice. The association between Lucia, or light, in this season of darkness, and the saint of the same name, has led many, especially in the darker areas of northern Europe, to celebrate St. Lucy day as a festival of light. In the Scandinavian countries, especially, in the northernmost parts of Europe, St. Lucy day has become ingrained in the culture. In Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland, young girls dress in a white robe with a red sash, to symbolize martyrdom. They also wear an evergreen crown with candles on it, almost like an advent wreath used as a hat. The people are reminded that the light of Christ shines through His people, such as St. Lucy, in the darkness of this world, a world shrouded in the darkness of sin and death.

St. Lucy was an actual person, living not in cold Scandinavia but in balmy Sicily, in southern Italy. She was born in the city of Syracuse, Sicily around the year of our Lord 283. According to legend, Lucy vowed to remain a virgin. The dowry that would normally be given to a future husband would instead be given to support the poor. This would have been quite difficult because Lucy’s father was already dead and her mother was sick. Without a husband, Lucy’s worldly future would be uncertain, so Lucy’s mother betrothed her daughter to a pagan suitor. In the meantime, Lucy and her mom went to visit the grave of another virgin martyr in Sicily, St.

Agatha. Apparently Lucy's mother was miraculously healed there and had a change of heart regarding her daughter's future. Lucy was allowed to give her dowry away to the poor.

One person, however, was not so pleased with this turn of events. Lucy's pagan fiancée was so upset when he heard the dowry was being given to the poor that he turned Lucy in to the governing authorities. Remember, this was in the early A.D. 300s, before Christianity was legal in the Roman Empire. Those who worshiped Christ and Him alone were liable to the death penalty. Lucy was dragged before the governor of Syracuse and commanded to burn incense to the Emperor Diocletian as a god. Lucy refused and instead said she foresaw the end of the emperor's reign. As her punishment, Lucy was sentenced to be defiled in a brothel. She then had her eyes gouged out before dying by a sword thrust into her throat. Less than ten years later, Christianity would be legalized in the Roman Empire.

Jesus Christ is the light of the world (John 8:12), the light no darkness can overcome (John 1:5). And Jesus says about His Christians, about His bride, the Church: "You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven" (Matt 5:16). Remember, the name "Lucy" comes from the Latin word for "light." St. Lucy truly was a light in this world, reflecting the light of Christ in her life and in her death. Lucy let her light shine before others in three ways: in her charity, in her virginity, and in her martyrdom. And as we reflect on the life and death of St. Lucy, as we see her good deeds, we give glory to our Father who is in Heaven.

First, we consider Lucy's charity. We live in an age of materialism and greed, especially around this time of the year as everyone is buying and selling as much as they can before the year is over. Giving generously is prominent in Christmas stories and movies, but Christian charity is a bit different than simply throwing money at a problem. Christian charity is really

about recognizing that everything we have is a gift from God and can be used to help those in need. When the Apostle Paul encourages the Christians in Corinth to give generously, he says: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). Christian charity is modeled after God’s charity for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His life for us, and so as Christians, as little Christs, we give everything for those who need us, to the household of faith first, but yes, even for those who hate us.

This is not a command to give 10% of your income to the church, before taxes, and then do what you want with the rest. No, Christian charity is realizing we don’t own anything. Everything we have belongs to God and God wants to work through what He has given us to bless other people. When St. Lucy decided to give her dowry to the poor, she wasn’t just giving a donation. She was giving away her entire livelihood in this world, her future financial security. Lucy trusted in God to take care of her in whatever situation, and so her example of charity is a model to us of Christian generosity. Lucy gave everything because she knew it belonged to God anyway, and God would see her through any hardships that might come.

St. Lucy is also an example to us in her virginity. This might at first seem strange to us in our over-sexualized age. Almost everywhere you turn, on t.v., in movies, in advertising, in the way people dress and talk, nearly everything has become sexualized. For many, sex and sex appeal have become integral to their sense of identity, which puts sex at the forefront of our minds even more than before. Our modern world has also tragically separated sex from its God-given purposes: companionship and delight between a husband and wife and the procreation of children. Pornography, divorce, abortion, despising God’s gift of children, and filth of every

kind are around us everywhere and have led to untold tragedy for families and individuals, even in the church.

Part of the over-sexualization of our society today has led to a corresponding despising of the historic Christian virtue of virginity. For centuries, refraining from marriage and sex was praised in the church. Today, people over a certain age are laughed at if it's discovered they are virgins. We live in a perverted world where God's good gift of marriage is pushed off as long as possible, while at the same time, God's good gift of sex is prematurely pushed on those who are younger and younger, apart from marriage. Marriage and sex are good and necessary gifts of God, but we also can't ignore what Scripture says about those who remain single and chaste. In 1 Corinthians 7[:8–9, 38], the unmarried Apostle Paul says: "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion . . . So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better." Jesus was also a single man. After teaching about divorce, the disciples said to Jesus: "it is better not to marry." Jesus responds: "Let the one who is able to receive this receive it" (Matt 19:11–12). Marriage is good, but it brings with it earthly troubles. Remaining single is better, because it allows for more focus on the things of God. That's what Scripture teaches about marriage and virginity, even if it sounds crazy in this perverted world. St. Lucy, the virgin, is one of many examples to us from the early years of the church where virginity is praised for the virtue it truly is, as a way to dedicate one's life solely to Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom..

Finally, St. Lucy is an example to us in her martyrdom. Like all the Christian martyrs, Lucy knew what our Lord has to say about persecution and martyrdom, witnessing to our Christian faith with our blood. Jesus says of those who persecute His Christians: "Have no fear of

them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in Hell” (Matt 10: 26–28). Lucy commended her entire life and death to God. She was humiliated, tortured, and killed by the pagan rulers in unimaginably painful ways. In that, Lucy imitated our Lord, who was humiliated, tortured, and killed by the pagan rulers for the sins of the world. The light of the world, Jesus Christ, shone most clearly through His servant, Lucy, in her death. And so we praise our heavenly Father for her example.

In her life and in her death, St. Lucy trusted not in what her eyes saw, but in what her eyes of faith saw. She gave up everything in this life—her money, her future, her family, her dignity and life—everything for the Kingdom of God. Lucy was presented as a pure virgin to Christ, the true Bridegroom, and so she becomes an example to us who live in the dark valley of the shadow of death. The world around us hates true Christian charity, virginity, and the thought of pain and death, yet our Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world, still shines brightly in the world today. May He also shine through us as He did through His Christians in the early years of the Church, that we, like St. Lucy, might let our light shine before others, that they might see our good works and give glory to our Father in Heaven. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ ,Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Magnificat.