St. Martin's Day, when children sing songs and parade with lanterns, and it's time to eat a goose!

The celebration is rooted in the story of St. Martin of Tours, a Roman soldier who lived in the 4th century.

It's celebrated on November 11, in parts of Belgium, Holland, Netherlands, Austria, Germany, France, Poland, Latvia and Estonia and it commemorates the day St. Martin was buried.

When St. Martin was a young man, he was a soldier. The legend has it that one day in the winter, while on horseback, he came upon a poor man, barely clothed. St. Martin took out his sword and cut his cloak in half. He gave one half to the poor man for warmth.

Today, the story is remembered by the tradition of children parading after dark, carrying lanterns and singing songs, following a person on horseback who pretends to be St. Martin. The parade often ends with a bonfire. (The lanterns and bonfire seem to be a remnant from the old pagan festivals of light.)
In some places, the children go door to door, caroling, with their lanterns. They're given treats or money.

St. Martin was famous for his kindness. He was also known for his modesty and simplicity. In fact, it was his great humbleness that led to another important tradition associated with the holiday: It's said his parishioners loved him so much that they insisted he become bishop of Tours. But he felt unworthy of the honor, and so, when they came to appoint him, he hid in a barn filled with geese. When his pursuers approached, the geese began to cackle, giving away his position. He killed one of the geese, on the spot, in revenge. Later that night it was eaten for dinner, and people all over Europe still celebrate this day by eating geese.

The story illustrates that even a small act of kindness can make a big difference and the children's lanterns symbolize bringing light, warmth and hope into the world.