Stirring Up Our Hearts

Cooking in Advent
Notes from the Living Advent Workshop

By Jennifer Gregory Miller
November 3, 2012

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In the past, all of Christendom moved to the rhythm of the liturgical year; the times of work and
of rest, of mourning and of public celebration, were regulated according to the cycle of the
Church year. As human beings we are always in need of a pattern of living...We have Christ’s
own program for the year, a pattern of variety and beauty, of sorrow and splendor, of quiet
preparation and magnificent climax. We have only to rediscover and live this pattern. It should
all naturally fit into our daily rhythms and our lives will be filled with spiritual wealth and
wonder.” (Lydwine Van Kersbergen, *The Normal School of Sanctity for the Laity, the Liturgy*)

Cooking for the feasts and seasons of the Church is often referred to as “Liturgical Cooking” or “cooking
for the Liturgical year”. For generations, in every culture, there has been a connection between the
observance of Catholic feast days and seasons and serving symbolic foods to commemorate these
events.

My favorite Liturgical Cookbook is *Cooking for Christ* by Florence Berger. It was first printed in 1949 and
was the first American compilation of recipes for the Liturgical Year. Of all the books, this is still my
favorite (unfortunately, the original version is out of print). I have to share parts of her wonderful
introduction, because this captures completely what is liturgical cooking:

Of all the rooms in a house, the friendly, comforting kitchen is mother to us all. It is the source of
our food, our learning and our virtue. ...[T]he kitchen remains first and last in our affections and
memories.

There is, I believe, a reason for this, and it lies in the woman who is mistress of that kitchen.
Cook, you may call her. I prefer to call her "Christian in Action." She herself is Christ-centered
because she brings Christ home to her kitchen and, in corollary, her kitchen reflects the Christ
within her.

To some it may seem sacrilegious to connect cookery and Christ, but that is exactly what this
book means to do. If I am to carry Christ home with me from the altar, I am afraid He will have
to come to the kitchen because much of my time is spent there. I shall welcome Him on Easter
and He shall eat new lamb with us. I shall give homage to Him on Epiphany and shall cook a
royal feast for Him and my family. I shall mourn with Him on Holy Thursday and we shall taste
the bitter herbs of the Passover and break unleavened bread. Then the cooking which we do will
add special significance to the Church Year and Christ will sanctify our daily bread. That is what
is meant by the liturgical year in the kitchen.

A cry has gone forth to revitalize our Christianity. ... Now perhaps mothers and daughters can
lead their families back to Christ-centered living and cooking. Foods can be symbols which lead
the mind to spiritual thinking. After Christ had preached to the multitude, He fed them. If our
family is to hear the gospel, I shall first feed them on symbols and then on more substantial
meat. The one will help the digestion of the other.....

**Why should we consider cooking for the Liturgical year?**

1) We are celebrating with our family, and in doing so make memories and create bonds
2) We are celebrating with the Mystical Body, the Communion of Saints, the whole Church, our
larger family. We became part of this family at our baptism. With God there is no time, so in
His eyes He is seeing all those in the past, present and future, celebrating together.
3) Most importantly, we can enter more deeply into the Liturgy. These little reminders of the saint
or feast of the day keep us focused on the source and summit of our faith, the Mass.
4) And with the symbolism we present at dinner, it can bring us to prayer and especially help
nourish the personal prayer lives of our children.
During this Year of Faith, little practices like this in our daily life help our thoughts return back to the altar. Living the Liturgical Year is a small form of catechesis.

Realize that our gathering around these feasts doesn’t mean we have cook “liturgically” for every feast day and season. Compare the Church’s calendar to your own family’s calendar. Not all feast days and seasons are the same importance, nor are they celebrated in the Church’s liturgy the same way. You choose what saints and feasts are important to your family – favorite saints, nameday saints, baptism and other sacramental anniversaries, and saints and feasts that interest or benefit your family.

Cooking liturgically does not mean a dessert all the time! Any type of food can be used to incorporate feast day cooking: appetizers, soups, salads, breads, main dishes, side dishes, desserts.

While I’m suggesting various foods to bake or cook, not everything has to have symbolism or traditional meaning. Just having a special meal together with family (perhaps extended family) or having dinner out or take-out is a treat. I’m celebrating, too, and sometimes I don’t feel like cooking.

Even just designating a treat like ice cream or Italian ice or special fruit as the feast day dessert will bring home the message that this day is special. No extra preparation is needed on your part.

Make the traditions fit your family. Each family has their own health and food needs. My family has food allergies and sensitivities, and I also try to refine our recipes or choose healthy natural sources (Real Food, organic, Non-GMO, replacing vegetable oils, etc.). There are loads of cookbooks that can help you adjust recipes, some I have included in the list of resources.

An alternative to making a variety of recipes and struggling to adjust them all, find one or two recipes that work, and then change according to the feast day. An example would be cupcakes, decorated with symbols or colors according to the feast.

Get your family involved – you don’t need to do all this planning alone. Your family dynamic will change over time. When the children are younger you probably will do most of the planning, but when you children get older, give them ideas and inspiration and then let them help plan and even cook or bake for the feast days. It becomes more meaningful when they are more involved.

Cooking for Liturgical Feasts and Seasons can be a tool and a small step in growing the Faith. May your family be blessed this Advent season.
First Sunday of Advent

Themes:
Beginning of the New Liturgical Year, “Happy New Year”

Advent Figure: Isaiah

Stir Up Sunday: Be Watchful and Alert. From the original Collect of the Extraordinary Form, “O Lord, Stir up thy Might and come”

Advent Wreath Poster:

Food Ideas:
Prepare a recipe that requires a good stirring, with all members of the family taking a turn to stir, symbolizing hearts getting stirred, preparing for Christ’s coming.

It doesn’t have to be a dessert, make a risotto, or a stir-fry. Traditional recipes are Plum Pudding or fruit cake. There is a delicious recipe for plum pudding Evelyn Vitz’s A Continual Feast.

Our family is not particularly fond of fruit cake, so I prefer making a favorite family cake recipe, such as this one. My mother-in-law makes this for Christmas every year, but makes it ahead of time so the flavors can steep.

Sugar Plum Cake

2 cups sugar 1 cup cooked unpitted prunes*
3 whole eggs 1 cup chopped pecans
1 cup cooking oil 1 tsp. ground nutmeg
1 teaspoon vanilla 1 tsp. ground cloves
1 tsp. baking soda 2 tsp. cinnamon
2 cups flour 1 tsp. salt
1 cup buttermilk

*Cooked prunes: Dried plums or prunes. Cut in half or quarters. Add water and cook in saucepan until plumped up. Measure AFTER cooking.

Combine sugar, eggs, oil, vanilla, and buttermilk. Add dry ingredients gradually and mix well. Fold in nuts and prunes. Pour into greased and floured tube pan. Bake at 325 degrees F. for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Cool cake on wire rack. Sprinkle with powdered sugar, or add glaze. Store in refrigerator until ready to serve. Serve warm or cold, perhaps with whipped cream.

Glaze (optional)
1/4 cup cold milk
1/2 powdered sugar
Mix and pour on cooled cake.
Second Sunday of Advent

Theme:

Advent Figure: St. John the Baptist, voice crying out in the desert is calling us to prepare a way for the Lord.

Food Ideas

John the Baptist ate locusts and honey. Make foods that require honey, like Lebkuchen (Life Cake) from Germany. Or try desserts made with chocolate mint, such as Grasshopper Pie. The simplest approach would be a simple pie made from mint chocolate chip ice cream in a chocolate crumb pie shell. Or buy pre-made chocolate sandwich cookies with mint crème filling, or make your own. This recipe is from Taste of Home.

Chocolate Mint Sandwich Cookies

**Ingredients**

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<tr>
<td>6 Tbsp. butter, cubed</td>
<td>Filling:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-1/2 cups packed brown sugar</td>
<td>2-1/2 cups confectioners' sugar</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Tbsp. water</td>
<td>1/4 cup butter, softened</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 cups (12 oz) semisweet chocolate chips</td>
<td>3 Tbsp. milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 eggs</td>
<td>1/2 tsp. peppermint extract</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tsp. vanilla extract</td>
<td>3 drops green food coloring, optional</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour</td>
<td>Dash salt</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-1/2 tsp. baking soda</td>
<td>1 tsp. salt</td>
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**Directions**

In a small saucepan, combine the butter, brown sugar, water and chocolate chips. Cook and stir over low heat until chips are melted. Cool. Beat in eggs and vanilla. Combine the flour, baking soda and salt; gradually add to chocolate mixture.

Drop by rounded teaspoonfuls 2 in. apart onto ungreased baking sheets. Bake at 350° for 10-12 minutes or until firm. Remove to wire racks to cool.

In a large bowl, combine filling ingredients until smooth. Spread on the bottoms of half the cookies; top with remaining cookies.

Yield: about 2-1/2 dozen sandwich cookies.
2nd Sunday Continued:

If you want to feature the honey, Lebkuchen or Life Cake or Honey Cakes from Germany are a very traditional and symbolic cookie. To quote Florence Berger from *Cooking for Christ*:

If you would ask which cookie spells Christmas to me, I would vote for the sweet, honeyed *Lebkuchen*. Some modern writers have explained the name *Lebenkicken* or Life Cake as a cookie hard and heavy enough to have a long life. That sounds like utter foolishness to me. They are too good to live long in anyone's cookie jar.

The life cake is, rather, a religious symbol of the new life which we find at Christmas. When we Catholics receive the consecrated Host at the Christmas Mass, we pray: "May the new life derived from this Sacrament ever revive us, O Lord: since it is His Sacrament whose wonderful birth hath overcome the old man." The Lebkuchen is a perfect carry-over of the Bread of Life to a special feast day cake. Anyone who is sensitive to symbolic language can understand its Christmas message. We do not hold Christmas merely as a memory of the Lord's birth, but each year we, too, are reborn into Christ and die to the old man of sin so that we might be a "people acceptable."

And here is her recipe. She suggests to cut the cakes into rectangles, but many regions cut into circles.

**Lebkuchen (Life Cake)**

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<tr>
<td>1/4 teaspoon nutmeg</td>
<td>1-3/4 cups honey</td>
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<td>1/4 teaspoon cloves</td>
<td>1/4 cup water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1/2 teaspoons cinnamon</td>
<td>2 cups brown sugar</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-1/2 cups shredded orange peel</td>
<td>2 eggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-1/2 cups chopped citron</td>
<td>8 cups flour</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 cups chopped blanched almonds</td>
<td>1/2 teaspoon soda</td>
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<td>1/8 teaspoon salt</td>
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Boil honey, sugar and water for five minutes. Beat in the eggs. Add sifted dry ingredients. Stir in fruit and almonds. Cover, and let stand overnight to ripen. Roll one-fourth inch thick. Cut into rectangles one inch wide by three inches long. Give cookies plenty of room on greased sheet. Bake in moderate oven (350°) for 15 minutes. When cool, ice with:

1 cup confectioners' sugar
1 teaspoon lemon juice
5 teaspoons boiling water
Third Sunday of Advent

Theme:
Known as Gaudete Sunday, after the first word of the Introit, Rejoice, from St. Paul to Philippians. “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.” Rose colored vestments are worn on this day, and the rose pink candle is lit on the Advent wreath.

St. Joseph is the figure of the Advent wreath

Food Ideas:
Serve pink or rose-colored foods, like a Strawberry smoothie, or Strawberry Italian Ice, shrimp cocktail, pink lemonade, or bake sugar cookies and use pink icing on top.

For St. Joseph we can use the candy cane, either in a cookie, or the simple candy itself. Part of the pious legend of St. Joseph is that his staff is the one that bloomed with lilies so that everyone knew that he was to be the spouse of our Blessed Virgin Mary. So many nativity scenes have St. Joseph carrying or leaning on the staff, which is also a symbol of authority. Although he was not the father of Jesus, only the foster-father, Jesus and Mary still submitted to him.

In March the Sicilian tradition of St. Joseph’s Altar includes bread or symbolic pastries shaped in the shape of his staff. But since Christmas baking is at hand, Candy Cane Staff Cookies will do perfectly to remind us of St. Joseph’s fatherly authority, but also his always humble submission to God’s will.

St. Joseph’s Staff — Candy Cane Cookies

Prep Time: 40 min, Total Time: 6 hours
Makes 4 1/2 dozen cookies

Ingredients:
1 cup sugar
1 cup butter, softened
1/2 cup milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon peppermint extract
1 egg
3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon red food coloring
2 Tablespoons finely crushed peppermint candies
2 Tablespoons sugar

Stir together 1 cup sugar, butter or margarine, milk, vanilla, peppermint extract, and egg in large bowl. Stir in flour, baking powder and salt. Divide dough in half. Stir red food coloring into 1 half of the dough. Cover and refrigerate at least 4 hours.

Stirring Up Our Hearts: Cooking in Advent by Jennifer G. Miller familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com
3rd Sunday of Advent continued:

Heat oven to 375°F. Stir together peppermint candy and 2 tablespoons sugar; set aside.

For each candy cane, shape 1 rounded teaspoon dough from each half into 4-inch rope by rolling back and forth on floured surface. Place 1 red and white rope side by side; press together lightly and twist. For best results, complete cookies one at a time—if all the dough of one color is shaped first, strips become too dry to twist.

Place on ungreased cookie sheet; curve top of cookie down to form handle of cane.

Bake 9 to 12 minutes or until set and very light brown. Immediately sprinkle candy mixture over cookies. Remove from cookie sheet to wire rack. Cool completely, about 30 minutes.

(Recipe adapted from Betty Crocker’s The Cooky Book).
Fourth Sunday of Advent

Theme:
The Advent wreath figure is the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

Food Ideas:
The colors we traditionally think for Mary are white and blue. Mary is a spotless virgin, so pure white foods. Blue colored foods (like blueberry) are another idea.

There are numerous symbols, such as the Fleur de lis, lily, flowering almond, rose, orange, and lemon. Just praying the Litany of Mary could give countless ideas of symbols of Mary.

Choose something simple, such as a blueberry smoothie, or blueberry scone. This time of year something with frozen blueberries will do nicely. Any foods served for Marian feast days like the Immaculate Conception would work here, too.

Here is a combination of two Marian symbols: the lemon and the white for purity. This recipe comes from the King Arthur Flour website, http://www.kingarthurflour.com/. An alternative recipe suggestion is the Lemon Blueberry cake from the blog Smitten Kitchen, http://smittenkitchen.com/.

Lemon Snowballs

1 cup (16 Tbsp) unsalted butter
1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 cup confectioners' sugar or glazing sugar
1/8 tsp. lemon oil or 2 tsp. grated lemon rind (zest)

2 cups unbleached flour

Preheat the oven to 350°F.
In a medium-sized bowl, beat together the butter and salt until soft and fluffy. Mix in the confectioners' or glazing sugar, and lemon oil or zest. Add the flour, mixing until well combined.

Form the dough into 1” balls. Place the balls on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake the cookies for 12 to 15 minutes. They should be very light brown on the bottom, and feel set on top.

Remove the cookies from the oven. Let them cool on the baking sheets for 3 minutes before disturbing. These are very fragile when hot.

To finish the cookies: Sift the confectioners' or glazing sugar with the lemon powder and place in a shallow pan. Roll the warm cookies in the sugar/lemon coating. Let the cookies cool completely, then add edible glitter (if desired) to the coating and re-roll in the sugar.

When completely cool, store cookies in airtight containers for 1 week, or freeze for longer storage.
December 6: Optional Memorial of St. Nicholas of Myra, Bishop

Theme:
The feast of St. Nicholas is one of the most popular. There is a whole website dedicated to St. Nicholas at http://stnicholascenter.org.

St. Nicholas was from Asia Minor, in modern day Turkey, born in the 3rd century. He gave up his inheritance to help the poor, and as a young man became a bishop, fighting against persecution and being a shepherd to his flock. We have more legends than fact for this saint, but all tell of the generous and loving heart for God and his neighbor.

He is the patron of many, including children and school children. He is often thought as the original Santa Claus. For some families, the stocking gifts are brought on the eve of his feast day.

Food Ideas:
Symbols for St. Nicholas are 3 bags of gold or 3 gold balls, due to his generosity of helping a poor man providing dowry for his three daughters. Oranges, since they are “golden balls” are a traditional stocking treat. Gold foil wrapped chocolate coins are also a favorite to leave in the stockings (or shoes). To continue with the gold theme, there are also Gold Nugget bubble gum, shaped like gold pieces.

We keep St. Nicholas’ day simple, although there are so many recipes for this day from almost every country, because his appeal is universal.

Refer to St. Nicholas Center and Catholic Culture websites for various recipes for this day. For me, it’s not Advent until I taste Speculaas (spelled also Speculatius or Speculaas, also Belgium Speculoos). This is one of my favorite family traditions. We try to have a cookie cutting party before his feast, with a simple meal, and serve mulled cider and enjoy family time.

My recipe comes from Cooking for Christ by Florence Berger. Find a high quality pure lard, like leaf lard. If you plan on making substitutions, shortening or margarine doesn’t work well in this recipe. All butter will spread a bit more than the lard/butter combination, but it’s the best substitute.

Speculatius (or Speculaas), Dutch Spice cookies

| 1 cup butter | 4 teaspoons cinnamon |
| 1 cup lard | 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg |
| 2 cups brown sugar | 1/2 teaspoon cloves |
| 1/2 cup sour cream | 41/2 cups sifted flour |
| 1/2 teaspoon soda | 1/2 cup chopped nuts (pecans) |

Cream the butter, lard and sugar. Add sour cream alternately with sifted dry ingredients. Stir in the nuts. Knead the dough into rolls. Wrap the rolls in wax paper and chill them in the refrigerator overnight.

Roll the dough very thin and cut it into shapes. Bake in moderate oven (375º) for 10 to 15 minutes. Let cookies cool, frost and/or decorate if you desire.
St. Nicholas Continued:

Of all the baking and preparations for Christmas, our speculaas is a personal must have, even if it comes after December 6. The dough tends to be sticky, so use flour for your rolling and cookie cutting. If the dough gets too warm it needs to be refrigerated to harden up again for non-sticky rolling. Our family’s favorite cookie cutters come from Cookie Craft, information below.

For those with special allergy needs, instead of substituting ingredients, use the speculaas spices in a simple safe sugar cookie recipe that’s tried and true. Another option I haven’t tested but will this year is taking the substitutions suggested by the new book *Learning to Bake Allergy Free* by Colette Martin, such as a combination of almond and coconut flours for the wheat flour, and plain almond yogurt for the sour cream.

For the chilly nights, mulled apple cider goes well with the speculaas cookies, but for the grown-ups, how about an adult drink named after the bishop Saint?

*Bishopwyn (Bishop's Wine)*

1 bottle of Claret (red Bordeaux style wine)  
4 inches stick cinnamon  
6 whole cloves

Break cinnamon into small pieces. Simmer wine and spices for about five minutes. Strain wine. Serve hot.

Sources for Cookie Cutters:


Gold foil Chocolate Coins:

Milk chocolate coins wrapped as gold coins are readily available around this time of year.

*Emmanuel Books* has milk chocolate coins with imprinted religious images  

For allergy safe chocolate, we have enjoyed:  

*Vermont Nut Free Chocolate* has dark chocolate dairy free coins  

(We haven’t had reaction to the two above, but VNFC mentions shared equipment with dairy, and Paidea doesn’t provide allergy information.)

*Stirring Up Our Hearts: Cooking in Advent* by Jennifer G. Miller [familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com](http://familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com)
December 8: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**Theme:**

This is a newer feast for the Church. Pope Pius IX in 1854 declared the Immaculate Conception as Roman Catholic Doctrine – we must believe that Mary from the moment that she was conceived she was without any trace of original sin, had no weakness or a sinful nature, and she remained sinless throughout her life. She was preserved free of sin from her first moment of life.

This is more difficult to explain to children, and there is a lot of misconception regarding this feast. It’s NOT the conception of Jesus, but Mary inside of St. Anne’s womb.

**Food Ideas:**

Today should be an emphasis on things remaining clean, pure as snow, white as milk. Serve an all white meal – not very visually appetizing, but foods like fish or chicken, mashed potatoes or rice, cauliflower or white asparagus.

Desserts could be meringue kisses or Mexican wedding cakes or cheesecake or flan or lemon sorbet or Italian ice or vanilla ice cream. A friend’s aunt used to make Divinity Candy to remind us how she bore the Divine Son of God.

Another idea taken from *Cooking for Christ* is to bake cookies full of spices, as the verse from Sirach 24:20-21 describes Mary, who was so pleasing to God:

> I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatical balm; I yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh; and I perfumed my dwelling as store, and galbanum, and onyx, and aloes, and as the frankincense not cut, and my odor is as the purest balm.

Bake gingerbread or other spice-filled cookies. This recipe is what Mrs. Berger suggests for this feast:

**Moravian Spritz (Gingerbread)**

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<tr>
<td>1/4 cup melted butter</td>
<td>1/3 teaspoon ginger</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/2 cup warm molasses</td>
<td>1/3 teaspoon cloves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/4 cup brown sugar</td>
<td>1/3 teaspoon cinnamon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-7/8 cups flour</td>
<td>1/8 teaspoon nutmeg</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/3 teaspoon soda</td>
<td>1/8 teaspoon allspice</td>
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Mix butter, molasses and sugar. Add sifted dry ingredients. Roll very thin.

Bake in a moderate oven (375° F.) for six minutes. Cookies may be iced.

Makes 100 cookies.
December 12: Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Theme:

Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego, an Aztec Indian on Tepeyac Hill near Mexico City on December 9, 1531. She identified herself as the ever virgin Holy Mary and made a request for a church to be built on the site. The Bishop hesitated, and requested her for a sign. On December 12, Our Lady sent Juan Diego to the top of the hill in mid-December to gather an assortment of roses for the Bishop, and left her image imprinted miraculously on Juan’s tilma, a poor quality cactus-cloth, which should have deteriorated in 20 years but shows no sign of decay 480 years later and still defies all scientific explanations of its origin.

December 12 marks the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, with St. Juan Diego a few days before on December 9. We usually don’t prepare anything special for St. Juan, but wait until a few days later to celebrate the feast of OLG.

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Patroness of the Americas, not just Mexico, and also Patroness of the Unborn.

Food Ideas:

With so much of Tex-Mex influence in United States it’s easy to think of Mexican ideas for this day. We make allergy safe tacos with corn tortillas. For a special treat I have purchased pre-made corn tortillas from Trader Joe’s and fried the tortillas. Some tortillas were salted and served with dinner, the others were sprinkled with powdered sugar and cinnamon and served as dessert. I don’t fry often, so this treat was gobbled up quickly.

There are many traditional Mexican desserts, such as flan. A favorite is Mexican Wedding cakes (also known as Russian Tea Cakes or Snowball cookies). For this feast, shape them in the half-moon crescents, to imitate the moon Our Lady stands in the image on the tilma. Mexican Hot Chocolate is another idea, and to be dairy free, substitute coconut milk for the cow’s milk.

Mexican Wedding Cakes

1 cup unsalted butter ½ teaspoon salt
½ cup confectioners’ sugar ¾ cup finely chopped nuts
1 teaspoon vanilla Extra bowl of confectioners’ sugar to roll cookies
2 ½ cups sifted flour

Preheat oven to 400° F. Mix butter, sugar, and vanilla. Sift together flour, salt, and add nuts. Work into mixture.

Shape dough into 1 inch balls or shape into crescents and place on ungreased cookie sheet (parchment paper helps here). Bake 10-12 minutes until set but not brown.

While still warm, roll in powdered sugar. Cool and roll in powdered sugar once more.

Adapted from *The Cooky Book* by Betty Crocker, 1963.
December 13: Memorial of St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr

Theme:
St. Lucia was from Syracuse, lived during the late 3rd century, died as a virgin and martyr. Part of her torture included removing her eyes. Legend maintains her eyesight was miraculously restored before she died, so she is the patron of the blind and eye ailments.

Her name means light, and her feast falls close to the Winter Solstice. In Sweden and other Scandinavian countries, even though they are predominantly Lutheran, St. Lucia is honored. Traditionally the oldest daughter, the Lucia Bride, dresses in a long white gown with a red sash. She wears a crown of candles brings in the St. Lucy treats and coffee to the family members in bed. An alternative to wearing the crown is to make a beautiful Lucia Sweet Bread Crown and put candles in that crown.

It’s a lovely tradition, but I have no daughters, and this feast actually is my youngest son’s birthday, so while we remember St. Lucy, our celebration is birthday themed.

Food Ideas:
Some of the traditional Swedish foods for the morning are Lussekatter, which are saffron buns and Swedish coffee. There are various interpretations of the shape of the buns. Trader Joes sells inexpensive Spanish Saffron which works perfectly.

Other ideas could be keeping the theme of light, like yellow foods, like Saffron rice, or make foods that remind of her patronage (eyeball recipes) or heritage (Sicilian recipes). This recipe, again, is from Cooking for Christ. Evelyn Vitz’s A Continual Feast also has a good recipe.

Lussekatter or Leissi Katter (St. Lucy’s Cats)

1 cake yeast
1 tbsp. sugar
1/4 cup warm water
1 cup milk
3/4 cup sugar
4 tbsp. shortening
1/2 cup raisins

1/2 cup currants
2 tbsp. saffron
3/4 cup hot water
1 tbsp. chopped citron
6 cups flour
1 tsp. salt
1 beaten egg

Add yeast and sugar to warm water. Scald and cool milk. When yeast mixture bubbles add to milk. Beat in shortening, sugar and two cups flour. Cover and let rise. Put saffron in three-fourths cup hot water one hour. Strain and add liquid to dough only for color. Combine fruits, flour and salt. Let rise again. Shape into oval buns with round heads. Add a tail if you wish. Use raisins as eyes. Brush with beaten egg and water and let rise again until it doubles its bulk. Bake in a moderate oven (350°) for 30 minutes.
December 17-23: The Greater “O” Antiphons

Theme:

By the seventeenth of December, both the Church and the children become increasingly impatient for Christmas. This holy impatience has found expression in the beautiful antiphons which call Christ to come, and to come quickly. These are antiphons in the Church’s liturgy dating from the seventh century that invoke God. Using seven different names from our Salvation History in the Old Testament, each antiphon begins with the invocation "O" and impatiently begging God to come and save His people.

It is very natural for children to want to use the "O Antiphons" for their daily prayer at this time. We sing the corresponding verse to “O Come Emmanuel” at the evening meal when the Advent wreath is lighted. (See http://familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com/2010/12/16/o-antiphons/ for O Antiphon prayer booklets.)

With all the wonderful feasts and traditions in Advent, this is one of my favorites. If I do St. Nicholas and the “O” Antiphons for Advent and nothing else, I am satisfied. And even if I’ve failed at consistency with different traditions for the Advent season, the “O” Antiphons are the saving grace — I can pick up the pieces from a busy, scattered Advent and finish with a little extra effort.

These Antiphons evoke wonderful family memories for me. My siblings and I fondly remember when our family implemented the ideas inspired by Cooking for Christ by Florence Berger:

Another old custom which we revived is giving family treats. In the monasteries long years ago, the different monks furnished extra treats on these days before Christ’s birthday. The gardener gave the community some of his finest dried or preserved fruits on December 19 when he called on Christ: "O Root of Jesse, come to deliver us and tarry not." The cellarer unlocked the best wine or his treat as he called: "Oh Key of David, come, and come quickly." Finally, on December 23, the abbot gave his extra gift to the brothers. Expense accounts which are still extant show how generous and extensive a list of foods were used on the abbot’s "O day."

Each one in our family keeps his gift a deep, dark secret until supper time. We begin with the smallest child. Her treat may be only a graham cracker for dessert. Freddie cracked and picked some black walnuts for us. All the pounding didn’t give it away because little boys are so often pounding. Ann made some Advent wreath cookies and used up all the cinnamon drops for decoration — on the cookies, her face and her fingers. Mary made a big casserole of baked beans and we couldn’t quite decide whether she was treating herself or the family. Finally, it was mother’s turn, and then, at last, father’s turn to produce something really outstanding. At dessert time father rose from the table without a word, put on his hat and coat without a smile and left us sitting at the table with our mouths open in amazement. After five minutes which seemed like hours, he stamped back into the house — with a big bowl of snow ice cream. The squeals of delight would have pleased an abbot.
**O Antiphons, Continued**

So, with a family of seven children, we were able to assign an O Antiphon day for each person except the two babies. That person then supplied a special treat after dinner for celebration of the Great Os. Mom helped the little ones, but even my dad surprised us with a treat on his day. Then at prayer time we opened up the new window of our Advent Tower and sang the corresponding verse to *O Come O Come Emmanuel*. It was very simple, but it made a lasting impression. I never tire hearing or singing this Advent hymn, as it just conjures all the Old Testament longing with a haunting melody.

The tradition works well in larger families. I find it enjoyable to see the interesting variety of what each person likes as their personal treat, and wants to share for everyone.

For a variation on a theme, how about serving a food that would be a reminder of the O Antiphon of the day? Since there already seems to be a glut of (fattening) sweets around the house, I'm not suggesting dessert recipes, but just a food with either minimal preparation or something that can be incorporated in the family dinner meal.

**December 17: O Wisdom (O Sapienta):**

O Wisdom, you came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and reaching from beginning to end, you ordered all things mightily and sweetly. Come, and teach us the way of prudence.

**Symbols:** Oil lamp, open book, dove (Holy Spirit).

**Foods:** Incorporate foods that are known to be “brain food” or antioxidants, such as blueberries and tomatoes, dark chocolate and avocados. But my top choice for this idea is the egg. How about deviled eggs?

**December 18: O Lord and Ruler (O Adonai):**

O Lord and Ruler of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush, and on Mount Sinai gave him your Law. Come, and with outstretched arm redeem us.

**Symbols:** Burning bush, stone tablets

**Foods:** The symbol of the burning bush evokes hot, spicy, or flaming foods. Grilled or flame broiled, Flambé foods, or hot and spicy. How about a simple tomato salsa with a little kick served with tortilla chips?

**December 19: O Root of Jesse (O Radix Jesse):**

O Root of Jesse, you stand for the ensign of all mankind; before you kings shall keep silence and to you all nations shall have recourse. Come, save us, and do not delay.

**Symbols:** flower, plant with flower, root with flowering stem

**Foods:** Root Vegetables, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, potatoes, or yams would call to mind the Root of Jesse. Another idea is to incorporate flowers in some way, like broccoli salad.

**December 20: O Key of David (O Clavis David)**

O Key of David, Scepter of the house of Israel, you open and no man closes; you close and no man opens. Come, and deliver him from the chains of prison who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.

**Symbols:** Key, broken chains
O Antiphons, Continued

**Foods:** Serve a bowl of unshelled nuts with a nutcracker. Without the “key” (nutcracker) you cannot get inside easily. Breaking the nut can be a reminder of the broken chains. Or how about incorporating Key Limes?

**December 21: O Rising Dawn (O Oriens):** O Rising Dawn, Radiance of the Light eternal and Sun of Justice; Come, enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

**Symbols:** Sunrise, sun

**Foods:** Citrus fruits, such as oranges or clementines have long been reminders of the sun.

**December 22: O King of the Gentiles or Nations (O Rex Gentium):** O King of the Gentiles, Desired of all, you are the cornerstone that binds two into one. Come, and save poor man whom you fashion out of clay.

**Symbols:** Crown and scepter; cornerstone

**Foods:** Wreath cookies, Donuts, crown shaped dessert. If using the cornerstone as the main symbol, a loaf shaped food would give a visual idea of a brick or cornerstone. How about a pound cake, banana bread for dessert, or meatloaf for dinner (but spare the jokes about how hard the meatloaf is)?

**December 23: O Emmanuel:** O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Expected of the nations and their Savior: Come, and save us, O Lord our God.

**Symbols:** Manger, Chalice and host, Crown with tablets

**Foods:** Considering the symbols, bread and wine would be a simple addition for the meal. Even though the people of the Old Testament didn’t realize that Emmanuel was to come in the form of a baby, we do know that Jesus became man, first as a helpless infant. Think of soft “mushy” foods to serve: mashed potatoes, ice cream, pudding, rice pudding, or applesauce.
Further Resources:

- *Family in Feast and Feria*, my blog, has some other material, [http://familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com](http://familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com) In particular, see

Websites:

- Catholic Culture, Liturgical Year section [www.catholicculture.org](http://www.catholicculture.org)
- Women for Faith and Family [www.wf-f.org](http://www.wf-f.org)
- Faith-Filled Days [https://sites.google.com/site/faithfilleddays/](https://sites.google.com/site/faithfilleddays/)
- *Catholic Cuisine*, Catholic cooking blog: [http://www.catholiccuisine.blogspot.com](http://www.catholiccuisine.blogspot.com)

Cookbooks:


Allergy Cookbooks:


Out of Print Books: some of these can be found digitally online:


Stirring Up Our Hearts: Cooking in Advent by Jennifer G. Miller [familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com](http://familyfeastandferia.wordpress.com) 19