

ESTHER

COOKING WORKSHOP

PASSAGE

Bible Story: Book of Esther, Chapters 1-10

Key/Memory Verse: Esther 4: 14b

PURPOSE

Objectives for Cooking Workshop

- to reinforce the story of Esther by exploring some traditional foods that Jewish families eat to celebrate Purim, the Jewish holiday which commemorates the events of the Esther story;
- to make a gift of food, a requirement of Purim, and to talk about Christian traditions of giving and sharing food.

PREPARATION

Materials List

- Ingredients are listed with each recipe.
- Oven
- Select how you will present your gifts: on plates covered with plastic wrap? a ribbon? a gift card? a sign for coffee hour?

Advance Preparation Requirements

1. Read the Book of Esther using the scroll of Esther (Megillat Esther)
2. Read the Purim Cooking Background which follows:

The Book of Esther (9:21-22) enjoins the faithful to "keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should

make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor." The minimum requirement is to make one gift, which may be food, to each of two poor persons. Even a poor person is required to make these gifts. The gifts should NOT be a part of one's tithing, but over and above all other planned giving for the year.

Additionally, most Jews also enjoy a Purim feast (a seudah or meal) and giving gifts of food to friends and family. Food gifts should be ready-to-eat without further preparation. Elaborate gifts are available and can be viewed on the worldwide web (see www.purim.com).

The feast of Purim is preceded by a fast (Ta'anit Esther), which commemorates the three days that Esther asked all Jews of Persia to fast with her as she prepared herself to approach King Ahasuerus. In 2003 the Fast of Esther begins on March 17, followed by the Feast of Purim in Open Cities on March 18, and the Feast of Purim in Walled Cities on March 19. In our time, Jerusalem is considered the only Walled City. (You can find the dates for other years at the interactive calendar site: www.hebcal.com.)

By far the most popular food for Purim is the cookie known as hamantasch (plural = hamentaschen). The traditional cookie is triangular with a poppy seed or fruit filling. The shape is usually explained by the fashion for three-cornered hats in Persia, suggesting that the cookie resembles Haman's hat, which one can destroy by simply eating it. The Hebrew name for this delicacy means Haman's ears. The poppy seed filling possibly comes from a tradition that Esther became a vegetarian at her marriage, eating mostly seeds. While the Book of Esther gives no information about Esther's diet, Daniel, another exile in Persia, kept Jewish dietary law by eating only vegetables (Daniel 1:8-16).

The Purim feast is accompanied by much wine because drinking banquets played such an important part in the story of Esther. One tradition is that everyone should drink until they can no longer tell the difference between "Cursed be Haman" and "Blessed be Mordecai." One opposed to such excessive drink could fulfill this requirement by sleeping because one who sleeps also doesn't know the difference between a curse and a blessing. (www.torahtots.com)

Other Purim foods:

Kreplach: ground meat wrapped in dough, also folded in a triangle

Purim challah: a special, very large challah with raisins

Purim fish: are cooked in vinegar, raisins and spices

Seeds, beans and legumes: a reminder that Esther ate only seeds in Persia. www.torahtots.com tells us "Additionally, beans symbolize sadness, as they are traditionally eaten after a funeral. We eat them on Purim, amongst the merriment, to remind us that we are still in exile."

Turkey: Purim feasts do offer both beef and poultry, despite the vegetarian traditions about Esther. Turkey may be a Purim food because its Yiddish name is "India bird," and

Ahasuerus' kingdom extended from Ethiopia to India. Another theory is that a turkey is a foolish bird, and Ahasuerus was a very foolish king.

Recipes for three different Purim feasts are included to illustrate possible menus. The most practical to prepare in a single session are the simple hamantaschen made from store-bought cookie dough with prepared filling and the no-bake gift cookies. The DISADVANTAGE to the Pillsbury sugar cookie dough we tested is that it doesn't hold the triangle shape very well. One way to correct this is to re-inforce the shape when you take the cookies out of the oven while they are still soft. The recipe dough holds the shape well.

RECIPES

There is considerable variety in the recipes for hamantaschen, no doubt influenced by the many countries in which Jews have settled and also by the need to keep kosher by not serving meat and dairy in the same meal. There are yeast doughs and cookie doughs and pastry doughs. All the doughs require refrigeration for at least 20 minutes (many as long as 4 hours or overnight) before rolling out the cookies. You will therefore probably need to prepare your dough before class. You might also consider substituting a commercial refrigerated cookie dough.

Hamantaschen

For the dough:

1/2 cup butter or vegetable fat
1 cup sugar
1 egg
1 Tablespoon milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups sifted flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt

For the filling:

2 cups poppy seeds, finely ground
1 egg
1/4 cup cake or bread crumbs
1/3 cup honey or sugar
1 Tablespoon lemon juice
1/4 cup chopped nuts (N.B. allergies?)

1. Cream together the butter and sugar. Beat until fluffy.
2. Add egg, milk and vanilla. Beat well.
3. Sift together flour, salt and baking powder.
4. Stir dry ingredients into creamed mixture to make a soft dough.
5. Roll into 2 logs approximately 2 inches in diameter. Wrap tightly in waxed paper. Chill

in the refrigerator for at least 20 minutes. COLD DOUGH IS ESSENTIAL TO SHAPING THE COOKIES AND THE TRIANGULAR SHAPE IS IMPORTANT.

6. Give each student a square of waxed paper on which to work. Cut the logs into 1 inch thick slices. Give each student a slice. Fold the waxed paper over the top of the slice so you can work with it without handling it. Have them flatten the slices into 3 inch circles. HANDLE THE DOUGH AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE!

7. Open the waxed paper. Place a TEASPOON of filling in the center of each circle. Using the waxed paper to guide each fold, fold three sides toward the center, making a triangle, and pinch the edges together over the filling. Pinch edges firmly so the filling won't leak. (For an illustrated guide to folding these goodies, consult www.chabad.org/holidays.)

8. Arrange well separated on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake in a 400 degree oven for 10-12 minutes. Makes about 36 hamentaschen.

Poppy Seed Filling:

Poppy seeds may be purchased finely ground or processed in a food grinder or mortar and pestle. Poppy seed filling may also be purchased ready-made. To make the filling yourself, combine the finely ground poppy seeds with the other ingredients.

Fruit Filling:

Use your favorite jam or preserves. Apricot, prune and date fillings are traditional.

Chocolate Filling:

This is not traditional, but was recommended in several Jewish cookbooks and websites as a children's favorite. Use semi-sweet chocolate chips or miniature M&M's. Be sure to serve warm and melting, but pinch those edges tightly!

3. Select a food "mission".

Some possibilities might be:

- to deliver your cookies as gifts to shut-ins of your congregation;
- to prepare sweets for your congregation's fellowship time after worship;
- to prepare and deliver sweets for classmates absent this week.

4. Decide how you will tell the Esther story. Since the story is somewhat long and involved, workshops early in the rotation may want to use a children's picture Bible to help. If this is late in the rotation then the children might be able to piece together the story without any reading from Bible or scroll (Megillat Esther) which is a paraphrase of the story.

PRESENTATION

Open - Introduction

Opening prayer should include thanking God for always being with us in good times and

bad times.

YOU MAY WANT TO COOK FIRST AND TELL THE STORY WHILE THE COOKIES ARE IN THE OVEN (15-20 minutes).

Talk about how we celebrate important occasions. Likely, food will be an important component of celebrations. When and why does your congregation gather for meals? What meals are special to your family? In many ways Purim is like a Thanksgiving dinner, more a civic festival than a religious ritual, but with honoring God as an important component. You can add a little of the festival of Purim from your reading of the background.

Re-tell the Esther story with your class. If this workshop occurs early in the rotation, you may need to devote at least ten minutes to this task.

Ask how your students' families or your congregation care(s) for the needy at Thanksgiving and at other times. Read or share Esther 9:22, the requirement that when Jews make a feast to remember their deliverance from their enemies they should also "send gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor." Talk about why this requirement would be included in the celebration to remember this event.

Dig - Main Content

Prepare your food, package it for delivery or arrange it for serving. Deliver your gifts. Enjoy your work! Tell the story of Esther!

Reflect - Closure

Gather in the Oasis. Closing prayer should again thank God for being with us, for blessing us, for encouraging us to share our blessings. Remember the needy, specifically those who will receive the food gifts.

SOURCES

Books

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Gilliam, Brenda. "Peanut Butter Paper and Paste." Fenton, MO: Creative Communications for the Parish, 2001.

Levy, Faye. *1000 Jewish Recipes*. Foster City, CA: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000.

Websites

www.chabad.org/holidays

www.hebc.com

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www.torah tots.com