



with the lemon pepper. Brown the chicken for a few minutes, then flip it and brown the other side for another few minutes. Add the chicken broth, stir, cover the pan, and let the chicken and onions cook 5-10 minutes until both are tender. Pour the pomegranate molasses over the chicken mixture and add the parsley flakes and dates. Stir to combine all the ingredients, cover the pan again and let the mixture cook a couple of minutes. Turn off the heat and let the mixture sit a few minutes to make sure the chicken is cooked through and meld the flavors. Serve the chicken on top of the bulgur with the sauce spooned over the top. Sprinkle the chicken with fresh parsley and pomegranate arils, if you'd like.

Bulgur

1 cup of bulgur

1½ cups of reduced sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon of dried parsley flakes

Stir all the ingredients together in a saucepan. Bring everything to a boil over medium high heat. Reduce the heat to a simmer, cover the pan, and let the bulgur cook 10-15 minutes or until it absorbs most of the liquid.

Pomegranate Molasses

2 cups of pomegranate juice

¼ cup of sugar

2-3 tablespoons of lemon juice

Combine all of the ingredients in a saucepan and bring them to a simmer, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Let the mixture cook for an hour, uncovered, until syrupy and reduced by about half.



Baked Zucchini – Serves 8

This is a simple way to cook squash, but the end result looks and tastes impressive.

Even my son, who has never been a zucchini lover (no, they are not nasty, green snakey things!), likes the squash this way.

4 medium/large zucchini, washed, trimmed, and halved, lengthwise

1 tablespoon of olive oil

1 teaspoon of lemon-pepper seasoning

2 tablespoons of grated Parmesan cheese (from the round green canister is fine)

2 tablespoons of seasoned dry breadcrumbs, preferably whole-wheat

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Coat a baking sheet with non-stick spray and arrange the 8 zucchini halves, cut side up, on it. Brush or mist the cut side halves with olive oil and sprinkle them with lemon-pepper. Divide the Parmesan cheese and breadcrumbs evenly among the halves. Bake for about 20 minutes until the squash is crisp-tender and the topping is brown.



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Strawberry Avocado Torte – Serves 12

Don't tell your family or guests what's in this torte. Let them guess. The filling is only faintly green, and it's cool, creamy, and delicious. The not-too-sweet strawberry topping makes a nice color and taste contrast to the filling. This is a great dessert for a busy season, because it can be made ahead and refrigerated until serving time. Serve the torte plain or with a little non-fat whipped topping to decorate it.

1 cup of almond meal

2 tablespoons of canola oil

1 teaspoon of cinnamon

1 egg

1 medium/large ripe avocado, mashed well

1 15-ounce can of low fat sweetened condensed milk

¼ cup of lemon juice

¼ teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

1 cup of sliced strawberries

1 tablespoon of sugar

1 tablespoon of cornstarch

½ cup of water

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees and coat a 9- or 10-inch spring form pan with nonstick cooking spray. In a bowl, combine the almond meal, canola oil, and cinnamon and mix them well. Pat the mixture onto the bottom of the prepared pan and bake the crust for 5-10 minutes or until browned. Set the crust aside.

For the filling, In a large bowl, beat the egg. Add the mashed avocado, sweetened condensed milk, lemon juice, salt, and vanilla extract and beat until very smooth. Pour the filling over the crust and bake the torte for 20-30 minutes or until barely set in the center. Let the torte cool to room temperature and then refrigerate it.

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For the topping, mix the strawberries and sugar and let them stand a few minutes. Mix the cornstarch and water. Add them to the berries and heat the mixture in the microwave in 30-second increments until the mixture thickens. Cool the berry mixture and pour it on top of the chilled torte. Refrigerate the torte for at least a couple of hours. To serve the torte, run a knife along the inside edge of the pan and remove the outer rim carefully.



What to Give?



Gift giving is something we want to do and we dread doing.

I've agonized for years about whether I've found the right things for everyone. Did I get enough? Did I get too little? Did I balance my giving between people so that someone didn't receive less than another and feel slighted? Constantly vying for my attention are the advertisements on radio, television, the internet, and in the newspapers for new, better, and more and more expensive gifts. Should I do more? Can I afford to give as I'd like and as people expect? And what do they expect?

We read in the New Testament (Matthew 3: 11) that wise men from the East came to Jerusalem to worship Jesus and brought him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. But what do we give?

The church I attend has for years had a special refrain at Christmastime: "It's not your birthday." Nor is it your spouse's, children's, other family members', or friends'. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus.



As God gave us the gift of Jesus's birth, and as the wise men brought gifts to the Christ child, so, too, do we often choose to give gifts to others as a celebration of love and caring. But it isn't our birthday, and we needn't go overboard, despite the media hype and advertisements. We can share our love with simple gifts that don't crash our budgets.

So, what do you give and how do you deal with the expectations of your friends and family? It may be a struggle to step back from the mass marketing, particularly if you have children, but here are some ideas:

- Explain to your friends and family that you want to show your care and love for them in ways that are more connected to the birth of Jesus rather than the sales at Macy's or Best Buys. Tell them that, instead of exchanging gifts, you'd like the gift of their company—at a meal, a movie, for a cup of coffee, or for a walk, for example—to celebrate the season.
- If your friends and family say they would like to continue exchanging gifts, suggest something relatively inexpensive, such as Christmas ornaments or slippers. Making or finding special ornaments that people can hang on their Christmas trees each year can be memorable and beautiful way to honor relationships. And imagine the fun in exchanging gifts of slippers (which many people need)! Do you get your sister some nice staid, practical black scuffs (maybe), a pair of pink sparkly mules (nah), or some furry brown bear paw slippers? Hmm. How about that pair of lime green Grinch slippers? Yes! They'd be warm, and her cats would be quite entertained by the slippers.
- Consider gifts of food for friends, family members, and coworkers. Sometimes a basket of fruit or a homemade gift of bread or cookies will be appreciated far more than a ready-made, expensive item from the gourmet market. Your gift is likely to taste better and be better for them, too. Not too long ago, as a special treat, I bought a macaroon from an upscale market. The market, which will remain nameless but is famous for taking whole paychecks for groceries, had a beautiful display of fancy cookies, and I love macaroons. Given that the cookies were over \$10 per pound, I bought only the one macaroon. It was fat, round, and golden brown on the top. When I got it home, I carefully unwrapped it, eagerly anticipating a dense, chewy dose of creamy coconut for the almost \$3 I had paid (I justified the purchase to myself as doing culinary research for this book). I tried to take a bite of my special cookie and found that it was harder than a hockey puck. The cookie looked nice but wasn't even fit for dunking like a biscotti (I did try). For far less money, I could have



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made a batch of macaroons that looked just as good, tasted better, didn't risk my teeth, and would have provided me plenty to share. So, instead of buying something from the gourmet markets, which may be of questionable quality, try making your own special food gifts.

- Consider “alternative gifts” of donations to charities in your friends’ and family members’ names. Providing gifts to help those in need is far more in keeping with the message of Advent than contributing to the department stores’ balance sheets. One of the best gifts I’ve ever received was a simple Christmas card from a co-worker with a notation that a meal had been purchased for a hungry visitor to a homeless shelter.
- If you have children, read with them the O. Henry story, the “Gift of the Magi.” Discuss the story and talk with them about the importance of the gift of love. Then enlist your children to help buy and wrap a gift for someone in need. Add a little bit of body text
- Explain to your children (and perhaps your spouse) that you love them and want to limit your gift giving to keep within your budget, reduce your stress, and enable you to spend more time with them instead of at the malls. You might suggest your intent to provide each of your children (and maybe your spouse) a trilogy of gifts:

- One educational item or book.
- One toy, game, or other “fun” thing.
- One item of clothing.



And that's it. No more. You may point out that the items you provide won't necessarily be expensive and that you hope they may enjoy the items as

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symbols of your caring, which goes far beyond the numbers and costs of the gifts. You might also remind your children that “it isn’t your birthday” and that, instead of having “gift overload,” you’d like them to focus on celebrating Jesus’s birth rather than on the mass marketing campaigns for stuff, stuff, and more stuff.

- Finally, choose an evening in Advent and designate it “Advent night” for your family or close friends. Prepare a special dinner (perhaps from this book?) and ask your family or friends to make a point to be present, to put down their cell phones and other devices, and to sit and enjoy the meal together. Talk to each other about what makes Advent and Christmas time special, what you’ve most enjoyed in the past, what you and they are doing now to celebrate, what you plan to do, what you all hope to do. Enjoy slowing down and being together.





Second Sunday of Advent

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God: if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 4: 7-12

Love

A carol with words from the poet Christina Rossetti reminds us that love came down at Christmas. How blessed we are if we can find a quiet time to reflect on the simple, clear lines of the carol and experience the grace of love.

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
Star and angels gave the sign.

(Christina Georgina Rossetti, 1830-1894)

Yes, we children of God, brothers and sisters to one another, living as neighbors in an ever smaller world, need to find in the days of this Advent week opportunities for acts of love toward those we do not know. We know God knows the strangers, just as God knows us! As Rossetti wrote, "Love be yours and love be mine, Love to God and all men."



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In the Kitchen, Second Sunday in Advent

Fennel-Apple Salad

Bavarian Pot Roast

Mashed Potatoes or Spaetzle

Broccoli

German Chocolate Pound Cake

This dinner is a Sunday classic made easy. The fennel-apple salad combines the anise flavor of fennel with crisp red apples, raisins, and toasted pecans for something far beyond ordinary iceberg lettuce—and much more nutritious. The pot roast cooks all day in the slow cooker, sending out amazing smells as it bubbles away with no work on your part. To round out the meal, some simple mashed potatoes to soak up the gravy from the pot roast are in order. Or try spaetzle, little egg dumplings, if you have more time. Broccoli steamed in the microwave is easy, adds color and nutrients to the meal, and goes well with the tender roast. Keeping with the German theme, you why not add a quick-to-make German chocolate pound cake. The cake doesn't involve a fancy frosting—it makes do with a drizzle of warm caramel topping—and it has a surprise ingredient that boosts its vitamin content considerably. A fluff of whipped cream or low-fat vanilla ice cream would make the cake even more special.

