



December 22

All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

Luke 2: 4-6

The trip from the craggy hills of Galilee south to Bethlehem was at least a three-day journey. Mary and Joseph and the burdened donkey needed food and water. With no money to spare--after all, they had taxes to pay--some bread, cheese, and an earthen jar for water were all the two travelers could manage. The donkey had to graze here and there along the road. Weary step after weary step, the road seemed endless. Now, as the Advent days move toward God's gift to a waiting world, do we not marvel at God's call upon two poor, young people?





DRAFT In the Kitchen, December 22

Kale and Beet Salad

Masala Pear Muffins

Stuffed Butternut Squash

Applesauce Cake

Tonight's dinner includes a few dishes that highlight the tastes of the season. Kale and beet salad is different. It's crunchy, fresh, and earthy, all at once. The salad includes a host of things that are good tasting and great for your body. If you'd like something in the carbohydrate category, some moist masala pear muffins would go nicely with the salad and main dish. The stuffed butternut squash recipe, like the kale salad, takes advantage of winter season produce—squash, onion, and apples—and becomes a savory-sweet, filling meal. The applesauce cake is a variant of one my mother made for years. You can bake the cake alongside the stuffed squash or muffins. The cake is simple, inexpensive to make, and not too sweet. Mom served squares of the cake at room temperature with dollops of whipped cream. I also like the cake warm with a scoop of low-fat butter-pecan ice cream or vanilla frozen yogurt on top.





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Kale and Beet Salad – Serves 8+

This recipe makes a large salad and features winter vegetables kale and beets for seasonal taste and color. Apples and carrots provide more sweetness, nutrients, and fiber. The feta adds a bit of salty bite, and the walnuts contribute additional crunch. If you'd prefer to cook or roast your beets rather than using canned beets, please do. I confess to liking the canned beets for their convenience (and lower level of mess), but the fresh ones taste better and are easy to cook in the microwave. Just be sure to let them cool before adding them to the salad. And, as long as we are changing things, if uncooked kale bothers your stomach, substitute feathery, slightly bitter arugula for the kale and proceed with the recipe.

8 ounces of kale leaves, washed, trimmed of their tough stems, and cut into

1-inch ribbons

3 tablespoons of olive oil

3 tablespoons of red wine vinegar

2 teaspoons of grainy Dijon mustard

¼ teaspoon of garlic powder

¼ teaspoon of pepper

¼ teaspoon of salt

¼ cup of strawberry or raspberry preserves

½ cup of shredded carrot

2 medium apples, cored and chopped

1 15-ounce can of beets, drained and sliced or cut into ½-inch pieces

½ cup of chopped, toasted walnuts

¼ - ½ cup of crumbled feta cheese

In a large bowl, whisk the olive oil, vinegar, mustard, garlic powder, pepper, salt, and preserves. Add the kale and mix well with your hands or two spoons to work the dressing into the kale leaves and soften them a bit. Add the carrot, apples, beets, walnuts, and



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feta and toss everything to combine the salad. Refrigerate the salad for at least a couple of hours. Toss the salad again just before you are ready to serve it.





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Masala Pear Muffins – Makes 12

These muffins are spicy-sweet and loaded with juicy, moist pears. The self-rising flour simplifies the mixing process, which takes only about 5 minutes, and the oats give the muffins great texture as well as some whole grain benefits. If you can't find masala at the market, try the homemade version at the end of the recipe.

1 cup of self-rising flour (see the note at the end of the recipe)

½ cup of oats (quick cooking or old-fashioned)

½ teaspoon of baking soda

2 ½ teaspoons of masala spice mix

1 egg

¼ cup of sugar

1/3 cup of canola oil

2/3 cup of buttermilk

¼ cup of dark brown sugar

1 teaspoon of vanilla

2 small to medium-sized pears, cored and chopped (and peeled, if you want)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and coat 12 muffin cups with nonstick cooking spray or use cupcake liners spritzed with spray. In a large bowl, combine the self-rising flour, oats, baking soda, and masala spice. In another bowl, whisk the egg, canola oil, buttermilk, sugars, and vanilla well. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ones and mix just until combined. Fold in the pears. Fill the muffin cups and bake the muffins for 22-25 minutes or until golden and a toothpick inserted in the center of a muffin comes out clean.

Note: If you don't have self-rising flour, use 1 scant cup of flour plus 1 teaspoon of baking powder and 1/8 teaspoon of salt)

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Make Your Own Masala

½ teaspoon of ground ginger

½ teaspoon of cinnamon

½ teaspoon of ground cardamom

½ teaspoon of allspice

¼ teaspoon of nutmeg

¼ teaspoon of cloves

1/8 teaspoon of black pepper

Combine all the spices and store in an airtight container at room temperature.



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Stuffed Butternut Squash – Serves 6

This is a meal in a squash. All you need is a salad and maybe some muffins or bread to go with the squash. To speed up the process, before stuffing the squash, you zap it in the microwave rather than roasting it in the oven. Zapping the squash first, in addition to cutting the oven time, saves your hands from the dangers of trying to cut up a very hard vegetable with a very large, sharp knife. After microwaving, the semi-tender squash can then be cooled, sliced, seeded, and stuffed with a savory-sweet mixture of ground turkey, vegetables, fruits, and herbs and baked in about 30 minutes. If you'd prefer it, you can use delicata squash instead of the butternut. They are smaller, take less time to microwave (about 3 minutes in my microwave), and have more tender skin than the butternut. I usually prepare the filling while the squash cooks. That cuts down even further on the time needed to prepare the dish. After the filling is ready and while the squash is cooling enough for me to handle it, I stir together the brown sugar-mustard topping for the squash and mix up some muffins so they'll be ready to go into the oven with the squash. This isn't an instant dinner, but it is nutritious, good, and easy to pull off in a fairly short amount of time. So don't be deterred by the ingredient list.

3 small butternut (or delicata) squash

1 teaspoon of canola oil

16-20 ounces of lean ground turkey (93 percent lean)

1 small onion, chopped

1-2 stalks of celery, chopped

2 medium apples, cored and chopped

1 teaspoon of dried ground sage or poultry seasoning

½ teaspoon of dried thyme

½ teaspoon of pepper

½ teaspoon of fennel seed

½ teaspoon of salt

1 cup of soft bread crumbs, preferably whole grain (2-3 slices, crumbled)

¼ cup of dried cranberries



¼ cup of dark brown sugar

2 tablespoons of grainy Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons of orange juice

½ teaspoon of cinnamon

Wash the squash well, pierce them with a fork or knife, place them on a microwave safe plate (I cover them with a paper towel to soak up the moisture), and zap them in the microwave for 10-15 minutes or until barely tender (just enough to cut them open, is fine). Let the squash cool for at least 10 minutes and cut them open lengthwise. Discard the seeds and stringy membrane stuff that holds the seeds inside the squash (the birds love the seeds).

While the squash cooks and cools, heat a non-stick skillet over medium high heat, add the oil, and when hot, add the ground turkey, breaking it up. Sauté the turkey for about 10 minutes to brown it. Add the onion, celery, apple, sage, thyme, fennel seed, pepper, and salt and sauté the mixture for 5-8 minutes or until the vegetables and apple soften. Remove the mixture from the heat and stir in the breadcrumbs and dried cranberries.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees, and coat a baking sheet with non-stick spray. Place the squash on the baking sheet and stuff the wells of the squash with the turkey mixture, mounding the mixture a bit, if necessary. Bake the squash about 15 minutes. While the stuffed squash is baking, mix the brown sugar, mustard, orange juice, and cinnamon in a bowl or large mixing cup. Remove the squash from the oven and drizzle or brush it with the brown sugar mixture. Return the stuffed squash to the oven and bake it an additional 10 minutes or until the squash is very tender and the stuffing has browned. Let the squash stand at least 5 minutes before serving them.

DRAFT Applesauce Cake – Serves 12-16

This is a simple cake that you can mix up in about 5 minutes and that, as it bakes, will scent your kitchen with wonderful aromas and bring memories of old-time comfort. The cake is modestly sweet, gets its moisture mostly from applesauce, and is studded with plump raisins and crunchy pecans. Cut the cake in squares and serve it warm with a dusting of powdered sugar, dollops of light whipped topping, or scoops of low-fat ice cream. Left over cake also is wonderful for snacks and even for breakfast—it's not as sweet as many breakfast cakes.

1 cup of flour

¾ cup of white whole-wheat flour

1 teaspoon of baking soda

1 teaspoon of cinnamon

½ teaspoon of salt

¼ teaspoon of nutmeg

¼ teaspoon of cloves

½ cup of dark brown sugar

½ cup of canola oil

2 eggs

1½ cups of applesauce

½ cup of raisins

1 cup of chopped pecans

Confectioners' sugar (optional)



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a 9 x 13-inch pan with nonstick cooking spray. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flours, baking soda, cinnamon, salt, nutmeg, and cloves.

In another bowl, whisk together the brown sugar, oil, eggs, and applesauce. Stir the applesauce mixture into the flour mixture until the dry ingredients are just moistened. Fold in the raisins and half of the nuts. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and smooth it out.

Sprinkle the top of the batter evenly with the remaining nuts. Bake the cake for 25-35 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Sprinkle the top of the cake lightly with confectioners' sugar, if you'd like.

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December 23

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of the kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Micah 5: 2-5

In the words of a prophet we find a reminder that we are on a day-by-day journey through the Advent season. This reading from the Old Testament asks us to remember again our place in the history of God's people. The passage calls us to take our places amid, and despite, the urgencies of today.



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