



The Gift of Bread

Holiday Cranberry Macadamia Bread

Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon grated orange peel
- 2 tablespoons shortening
- 1 egg
- 1 cup chopped or halved cranberries
- 1 cup chopped macadamia nuts



Directions

1. Heat oven to 350 °F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and soda. Stir to mix well.
3. Add orange juice and peel, shortening, and eggs to dry ingredients. Mix until well blended. Stir in cranberries and chopped nuts.
4. Turn into a 9x5-inch loaf pan that has been greased on bottom only. Bake for 55-65 minutes, until it browns on top and a toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.
5. Cool thoroughly before slicing.

at Christmas

I grew up making bread with family, especially with my grandma who owned a restaurant. She usually doubled her recipes to make multiple loaves. One day I asked, “Grandma why do you always make at least two loaves of bread?”

She smiled, “Two loaves are always better. Then we have one to give to someone who needs it.” She’d circle one month and six months on her calendar after a family lost a loved one, and brought them bread on those days. When she met someone new, she usually gifted them with bread. She mailed missionaries bread she baked in coffee tins and found many other reasons to give bread.

I gift people with bread too, especially at Christmas. I bake lots of Christmas breads, including a cranberry macadamia nut bread (see recipe below) and a sweet braided bread I shape into trees, candy canes, and hearts. Sometimes I make my loaves into muffins and create muffin bouquets by securing muffins to rounded Styrofoam balls with toothpicks and adding tiny decorations. I give neighbors bread along with a card. It’s a great time to chat and share a little faith.

Did you know the word **Bethlehem means house of bread?** The prophet Micah proclaimed Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus centuries before the event took place.

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity (Micah 5:2).

Such a fitting name to be the first home of Jesus. A humble abode for Jesus connected to a simple but important food. He came to earth to be with us and for us to know him. He called himself the Bread of Life and is the daily bread for our soul.

Bread holds a three-fold purpose in the Bible. The first is sustenance. God told Adam he would work for bread. In biblical times, grain and bread meant survival. Grain served as the gold standard in Egypt when Joseph oversaw the storage of wheat to bring the known world through a severe famine (Gen. 40-42). Carbohydrates found in grains used for flour are fuel for the body and brain that energize us in a time-released way.

Bread also symbolized hospitality and friendship, part of fellowship. This is the second purpose of bread seen in the Bible. One of the first examples of hospitality occurred when Abraham invited three strangers to stay and eat. He directed his wife Sarah to make bread for them with their finest flour (Gen. 18). It took more time to grind wheat finer, and thus it was more precious. After eating, with their hunger satisfied, the visitors spoke with



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Abraham and revealed God's plan to give them a child within the year.

We also see a demonstration of fellowship when the Shunammite woman persuaded the prophet Elisha to eat bread whenever he passed their way. He later repaid their kindness with the gift of a son to the elderly couple (2 Kings 4). Fellowship is also found when Boaz heard about Ruth, a woman he saw gleaning wheat in his fields in Bethlehem. He invited her to sit and eat bread with him (Ruth 2:14). They married and became the ancestors of Christ (Mat. 1:5). At that first meeting, they began their relationship as they dipped bread together.

Sitting around a table to enjoy warm bread, fresh from the oven, it's easy to savor the flavor and linger to talk and share from our hearts. When my children were young, they got excited whenever they arrived home from school to the aroma of warm wheat bread coming out of the oven. They grabbed plates, butter, honey, and napkins while I sliced one of the loaves. Then we'd sit, talk, laugh, and share what happened that day.

After Pentecost the early Christians shared in fellowship and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). This brought a closer faith fellowship and sharing in the Lord's Supper. The word *companion* means to break bread with someone and reflects the closeness of the Christian fellowship of communion.

Christ shared more than the bread he broke (Luke 22:19-20), for with it he gave us a New Covenant. Bread accompanied both the covenant with Moses and the new covenant. In the Old Testament, God told his people to always have twelve loaves of bread, called the Bread of Presence or Showbread, on the gold table in the tabernacle. These large loaves required about eight cups of flour each and were double the size of a normal loaf of bread.

The aroma of the bread baking each week and the large loaves set on the table served as reminders of God's presence. In the covenant with Moses, God promised to be their God, to be with them, and asked them to follow him and give certain sacrifices. In the New Testament Jesus became the sacrifice and promised restoration, forgiveness, and a close fellowship. Jeremiah 31:31-34 foretold details of the new covenant. Jesus became the Bread of Life, the very presence of God with us, at his birth.

That first Christmas angels directed shepherds to see the newborn Savior while a star directed wise men to the newborn king. These visitors remind us that God cares for all people everywhere, from lowly workers to rich scholars. Five miles from Jerusalem, the shepherds found Jesus lying in a manger—a food trough. He was the spiritual food available to everyone. In John 6, Jesus shared how he would satisfy our deeper hunger and give us eternal life. He wants us to build a relationship with one another and with him.

Jesus truly is the greatest gift of bread—the Bread of Life.

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