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the crumbs between the slices. Return the apples to the oven and bake them for about 10 minutes more or until the crumbly topping has browned a little. Let the apples cool for at least 5 minutes before serving them.



## December 12

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 4: 4-7*

Here is a story from the early days of the church. Paul, an apostle, or follower of Jesus, preached and taught the gospel of Christ to the early Christian community at Philippi, in northern Greece near the head of the Aegean Sea. Paul visited the city several times, probably between AD 49-57. He wrote a letter to the people of Philippi about 10 years after his first visit. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul affirms that God does not let us go. Paul has seen God's entry into the world, and he wants the Philippians to see and to sense that story as well. This is the Advent story he shares with them and with us.





## In the Kitchen, December 12

*Vegetables with Spinach-Artichoke Dip*

*Rosemary-Apple Pork Roast*

*Mashed Potato Casserole*

*Sweet and Sour Red Cabbage*

*Chocolate Stout Cake*

*Tonight's dinner would be a wonderful meal to share with friends. Everything can be made ahead to save you time in the evening. You can clean and refrigerate the vegetables—any you like, such as carrots, celery, pea pods, and broccoli and cauliflower pieces—the night before or earlier in the day. You can also prepare ahead the dip, mashed potato casserole, and sweet and sour cabbage. Just pop the dip into the oven for about 15 minutes before your guests arrive. The potatoes and cabbage can reheat while the pork finishes. The roast cooks in the slow cooker in four or five hours, sending out enticing aromas all afternoon. The chocolate stout cake actually improves in flavor if baked the day before. The hard part will be removing it from the oven and hiding it so no one finds and eats it before you want to serve it. The cake is wonderful plain, with a dusting of powdered sugar on top for decoration. If you're having guests and want to dress it up more, you could serve it topped with a bit of low-fat Greek yogurt or whipped topping and a few berries scattered around.*







## Hot Spinach-Artichoke Dip – Serves 16

*This dip is creamy and bubbling with cheese but is much lighter than the original version. Try the dip with vegetable dippers or bread or crackers. It's a wonderful appetizer or party dish.*

*¼ cup of low-fat sour cream*

*1 package (12 ounces) of silken tofu*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*8 ounces of frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry (1/2 of a 16-ounce bag)*

*1 14-ounce can of artichoke hearts, drained and chopped*

*½ cup of low-fat mozzarella cheese, shredded*

*¼ cup of shredded Parmesan cheese*

*Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Beat the sour cream and tofu until smooth. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix everything well. Pour the mixture into a casserole dish coated with non-stick spray. Bake the dip about 15 minutes or until it's hot and bubbly. Serve the dip with fresh vegetables, sliced bread, or crackers.*





## Rosemary-Apple Pork Loin – Serves 8+

*This pork loin is too good to wait for a Sunday dinner. The roast is tender, full of herbs and apple flavor, and very easy to make. The sauce, or apple gravy, goes nicely over the sliced pork and over noodles, rice, or mashed potatoes. This is a no-fuss, tasty recipe you'll be cooking frequently.*

*4-5 pound pork loin*

*1 cup of apple cider*

*½ teaspoon of garlic powder*

*1 tablespoon of minced dried onion*

*¼ teaspoon of dried oregano*

*1 tablespoon of fresh rosemary (or 1 teaspoon of dried)*

*¼ teaspoon of pepper*

*1 teaspoon of salt*

*3 apples, cored and sliced*

*¼ cup of flour*

*½ cup of water*



*Coat the insert of a slow cooker with nonstick spray and scatter the apples on the bottom. Put the pork loin on top of the apples and pour the apple cider over the top. Sprinkle the garlic powder, dried onion, oregano, rosemary, pepper, and salt on top of the pork loin. Cover the slow cooker and cook the pork on low for about 4 hours or until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the middle of the loin reads 140-145 degrees. Remove the pork from the cooker and cover the pork loosely with foil. Turn the slow cooker to high. Whisk the flour and water until smooth and then whisk the mixture into the liquid (and apples) in the slow cooker. Let the sauce cook, stirring occasionally, until it thickens, about 15 minutes. Slice the roast thinly and serve it with the sauce.*



## Mashed Potato Casserole – Serves 6-8

*This is a really good casserole. It tastes like a loaded baked potato—but better. Also, if you need an easy but excellent side dish that you can make ahead, this is it. Just prepare the potatoes to the point of baking. Cover the casserole dish with plastic wrap, and refrigerate the potatoes until you're almost ready to cook them. Remove the dish from the refrigerator to warm a bit before popping it into the oven (or zap the casserole in the microwave a few minutes to warm it). Then bake the casserole as directed. You may need to add a few minutes to the cooking time.*

*6 medium russet potatoes (or Yukon Gold), peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks*

*1 cup of low fat milk*

*½ cup of low fat sour cream*

*¼ teaspoon of pepper*

*1 teaspoon of dried minced chives*

*2-3 tablespoons bacon crumbles*

*½ cup of low-fat cheddar cheese*

*¼ cup of grated Parmesan cheese (from the round green can is fine)*

*¼ teaspoon of paprika*

*Place the potatoes in a saucepan with enough water to cover them and bring them to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat, partly cover the pan, and cook the potatoes for about 20 minutes or until they're soft. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Drain the potatoes. Mash them a bit, then add in the milk and sour cream, mashing everything well. Mix in the pepper, chives, bacon crumbles, cheddar cheese, and Parmesan cheese. Coat a 2-quart casserole dish with non-stick spray and pour in the potatoes, smoothing them out evenly. Sprinkle the potatoes with paprika. Bake the potatoes uncovered until they're hot and a bit browned, about 30-45 minutes.*



## Sweet and Sour Red Cabbage – Serves 4+

*This cabbage dish will stand up to hearty main dishes and is full of nutrients. Plus, it tastes really good. The apple and brown sugar balance the vinegar nicely and highlight the beautiful red cabbage.*

*2 tablespoons of olive oil*

*1 thin-sliced onion*

*½ a medium head of red cabbage*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*¼ teaspoon of pepper*

*¼ cup of dark brown sugar*

*1/3 cup of cider vinegar*

*1 cored and chopped apple*

*Heat the oil over medium-high heat in a large saucepan or Dutch oven. Add the onion and sauté it for 5 minutes or until it starts to soften. Add the cabbage and apple. Sprinkle on the salt and pepper. Cook the mixture for about 5 minutes to wilt the cabbage. Add the sugar and vinegar and stir to combine everything and dissolve the sugar. Reduce the heat to a simmer, partially cover the pan, and let the mixture cook for about 40 minutes or until the cabbage is deep purple and most of the liquid has been absorbed.*







## Chocolate Stout Cake – Serves 12+

*This is one of my son's favorite cakes. It has a rich, malty chocolate taste with just a hint of cinnamon. Although "lightened" with canola oil and Greek yogurt rather than butter and sour cream, the cake remains moist and sweet. I think the cake is best un-frosted with just a dusting of powdered sugar. Nonetheless, a little low fat ice cream or whipped topping nestled alongside has been tried to good effect in my household. My husband, who has tested the concept repeatedly, insists the cake also works well for breakfast.*

*½ cup of canola oil*

*1 ½ cups of sugar*

*¼ cup of molasses*

*2 eggs*

*¾ cup of Greek yogurt*

*2 teaspoons of vanilla extract*

*1 cup of chocolate stout (or Guinness)*

*1 cup of flour*

*1 cup of white whole-wheat flour*

*¾ cup of unsweetened cocoa powder*

*1 ½ teaspoons of baking soda*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*1 teaspoon of cinnamon*

*1 tablespoon of confectioners' sugar (optional)*



*Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a 9 or 10-inch spring form pan with nonstick cooking spray. combine the canola oil, sugar, molasses, eggs, the Greek yogurt, and vanilla extract and whisk them until they're well combined. Whisk in the stout. In another bowl, whisk together the flours, cocoa powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon. Whisk the wet ingredients into the dry until everything is just smooth. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and bake the cake for 45-50 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the*

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center comes out with just a few crumbs and no wet batter clinging to it. Let the cake cool in the pan for at least 10 minutes. Run a knife along the inside of the pan to loosen the cake and remove the outer rim of the pan. Dust the cake with confectioners' sugar if you'd like.







## How to Entertain?

Advent can be a special time to catch up with family and close friends. Advent also can be an opportunity to share the blessings of our lives with those we might not know as well and who would otherwise be celebrating the season alone. Yet the prospect of entertaining also brings worry and considerable angst. What will you prepare? Will you have enough? Will everyone like what you make? Will you overshoot your budget? Add to that the requirements of work, childcare, and getting your home ready to receive guests, and you may have a recipe for a meltdown rather than a company get-together.

I don't have a special solution to ease your angst. Nonetheless, preparing as much as you can ahead of time and enlisting others close to you to help with some tasks—cleaning, straightening up, and setting the table, for example—will ease some of your scramble. You certainly can use the menus in Part I of this book to help you with your planning. Any of the menus would be suitable for company. Some of the menus are more involved and expensive, and others are simpler and more economical. Also see Part II. Many of the “entertaining ideas” are easy, low fuss, and budget-friendly.





Keep in mind that, despite the media hype and glossy spreads in magazines, not every get-together needs to be elaborate or fancy. In fact many of your visitors, whether family, friends, or others you are just getting to know, might feel more comfortable and “at home” if you go to less fuss and expense. Often others, like you, may feel tired and stressed with the demands of work, home, and the season. Your visitors may not look forward to the prospect of gourmet fare served on fine china if, to eat it, they have to squeeze into tight-fitting formal clothing, sport snazzy but painful footwear, and maneuver multiple

*forks. Maybe what they, and you, need is not a complicated or sophisticated entertainment. Instead, you might all appreciate a time in which you can slow down, share fellowship, and relax and enjoy the real gifts of the season—love and caring for others. Here are a few ideas to get you thinking about some simple, frugal get-togethers:*