

BAKING UP CHRISTMAS

It's amazing, but true—we've reached another Christmas season—and with that season comes the tradition of baking—for some of us, baking is a favorite hobby. For others, perhaps it ONLY comes up at this time of the year—however, for most of us, baking some kind of Christmas cookies is a regular Christmas event. And so we get out the Christmas sugar cookie cutters and roll out the dough, piling on the icing and decorations, and sharing with all who are willing to test them out. But I wonder—have you ever stopped to consider that those Christmas cookie shapes might mean more than just another disguise for forbidden calories? I want to take a chance to review some of the basic Christmas cookie shapes that might grace your Christmas entertaining this year, with the intent of giving you some new ways of looking at those cookies as reminders of the true meaning that lies behind all the hustle and bustle of Christmas. So, let's begin with....

A STAR SHAPE! Not only used with Christmas cookies, but perhaps also the tree topper on your Christmas tree. Stars are made to get attention, and we certainly live in a star driven world. We buy magazines, visit internet sites, gather information on the latest music, movie, and financial stars. But behind the Christmas story is a challenge to consider another star—the one that announced Jesus' birth. That star should be a challenge to all of us to consider letting HIM be the star of our lives—to not be driven by the latest fashions or next HAVE TO HAVE gift. Jesus asks us to consider giving HIM control, instead of our fleshly desires or cultural fads and fashions. ROMANS 8:8-10 puts it this way:

Those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.) Since Christ lives within you, even though your body will die because of sin, your spirit is alive because you have been made right with God.

Jesus came to invite us to make him the star of our lives. Let's take a look at another cookie shape—

THE CANDLE SHAPE—You'll find those all around the Christmas decoration scene as well—There are never enough lights on the tree or in the Christmas display, are there??? The candle represents bright light guiding the way through darkness—and our world certainly has its share of darkness. We try to ignore it at Christmas, but it's still out there—the darkness of fear, worry, struggles, relationships that are coming

apart—we NEED SOME LIGHT. The good news of Christmas is that THE LIGHT HAS COME—as the Bible puts it in John 1.4 and 9

In him was life, and that life was the light of men....The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

So in our Christmas cookie cutter collection,we have the star and the candle, and who could miss

THE CHRISTMAS TREE SHAPE—How many of you already have your tree up? How many of you are looking forward to it? Dreading it? The Christmas tree is the standard of decorating—some with tinsel, some with unified colors and white lights, some with all the colors of the rainbow, but most of us have a Christmas tree. And behind that Christmas tree is a reminder of another tree, one that would later become the means of setting us all free—the Savior Jesus, born at Christmas, would die at Easter and rise again to give all of us a chance to live forever with God, if we are willing. What incredible love God showed us!

ROMANS 5.8 tells us this:

GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE FOR US IN THIS—WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US!

The next addition to the Christmas cookie cutter parade is the

STOCKING SHAPE! Yes, another standard of Christmas decoration! As the old poem says, THE STOCKINGS WERE HUNG BY THE CHIMNEY WITH CARE, in hopes that Saint Nicolas soon would be there. And in my family tradition, the little blessings are put in the stocking—the pack of gum, the candy bar, the little something that makes Christmas special. Fact is, little blessings aren't just for Christmas—they are the stuff life is made of. Unfortunately, the grind of everyday life often steals away those blessings—we end up with a shortage of hope and peace and joy and purpose, those little things that make life worth living. Anyone in the room here suffering from a BLESSING SHORTAGE? The stocking cookie should remind us that at Christmas, Jesus came to fill our lives with the blessings that really matter—THE ANGEL SAID IT BEST IN LUKE 2.10-14

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

Did you hear the blessings going by? GOOD NEWS, GREAT JOY, SAVING POWER, PEACE—Jesus came to fill our stockings with all of that.

Another cookie cutter to consider at Christmas is the

WREATH SHAPE. Wreaths are often woven of evergreen branches, and those evergreens have long been used as symbols of lasting life—growing, full, rich, forever life. And so again, the wreath Christmas cookie can serve as a reminder of the life Jesus came to bring us at Christmas—and also, it can remind us of our need to keep growing in our relationship with him—listening for his voice in the Bible and speaking with him in prayer. AS 2 PETER PUTS IT,

BUT GROW IN GRACE, AND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST.

Here’s a Christmas cookie favorite—

THE SLEIGH SHAPE. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind is Santa—bringing all those presents and spreading Christmas cheer. But a sleigh can also be a reminder that if we are to truly enjoy Christmas and our lives throughout the year, we need to GET ON BOARD with Jesus. That means getting involved with touching the lives of other people, sharing in the work of seeing people come to know how much God loves them. In a world that tends to focus only on ourselves and what we want, what a blessing it is to choose to be involved in the lives of others. James tells us in chapter 1 verse 22 that we should BE DOERS OF THE WORD AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, and we have a challenge from God to invest our lives in bringing His love to other people.

One more cookie cutter:

THE GINGERBREAD WOMAN SHAPE—it might look like a man, but this is a women’s tea, so let’s make it a gingerbread woman! One of the frustrations with this cookie is that pieces are constantly breaking off—an arm here, a leg there—so we end up with

a Or *Messiah*. “The Christ” (Greek) and “the Messiah” (Hebrew) both mean “the Anointed One”; also in verse 26 .

broken down gingerbread persons! I think that is a great picture of what happens to us when life comes at us with all its problems and struggles. Our husbands, our bosses, our families, our friends, the finances, the health struggles, steal away our wholeness and leave us as unfulfilled women. AND THAT'S WHERE JESUS COMES IN—he came to earth at Christmas to fill those gaps and bring us wholeness again. AS COLOSSIANS 2.10 says—AND YOU ARE COMPLETE IN HIM, WHO IS THE HEAD OF ALL PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS. Only in him can we be complete.

The fact is that long after all these Christmas cookies have been consumed and the cutters are put away, we are still in the baking business—BAKING UP SOME SORT OF LIFE day by day—and I'm sure that some of us in this room might say that the batch of stuff we are baking just isn't turning out—we end up baking up bitterness and selfishness and pain and disappointment and discouragement—that's not what God intended for us—in fact, when it comes to baking up a full, meaningful, purposeful life, God gave us the recipe, and I want to close tonight by reviewing that recipe with you. I've brought some copies along so you can take it home with you, but let's take a quick review—GOD'S RECIPE FOR CHRISTMAS JOY!

READ AND OFFER PRAYER—

This Christmas, the biggest thing God desires to bring into your life is NOT A GREAT BATCH OF COOKIES—IT'S A FULL BATCH OF HIS LOVE AND PEACE FOR YOU!