

FAITH AT HOME

A Handbook for Cautiously Christian Parents



WENDY CLAIRE BARRIE

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Good Friday

Right. This day is hard for adults, let alone kids, and it's really important to resist skipping over it and going straight to Easter. We do know how the story ends. We call Good Friday "good" because we are an Easter people. Even in the name we give it, we do not look at this day alone for the terrible thing that happened, that Jesus died on the cross. We look all the way to Sunday, when Jesus rose again. Jesus, whom we love, died on a dark day when soldiers shamed him, nearly all his friends left his side, and he wasn't even sure that God was with him. We tell the story of what happened that day because it is vital for our children to hear: Jesus was afraid, he suffered, he died . . . and God turned his fear, his suffering, and his dying into hope, wholeness, and new life.

We tell this story—our Christian story—over and over again because it tells us the truth: not that there is no darkness, but that "light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it."⁵ Remembering that gives us comfort and makes us bold, helps us encourage others and find goodness in the most difficult of days. We are Easter people because we have been to the cross and the grave and we know the promise God makes to us in Jesus: God's power and grace can transform anything; God's love is stronger than the cross, stronger than death itself.

You might bring some sweetness to this bitter day in a traditional way, by baking hot cross buns, a custom that dates to Saxon times. My husband makes this recipe:⁶

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HOT CROSS BUNS

Ingredients

- 1 package active dry yeast
- ¼ cup warm milk
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 3 cups all purpose flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon cardamom
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon allspice
- ¼ teaspoon cloves
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg (preferably freshly grated)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup warm milk
- ¾ cup currants
- 2 teaspoons grated orange zest
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 1 teaspoon milk
- 3 to 5 tablespoons powdered sugar
- OR, instead of milk and sugar: white chocolate chips

Directions

1. Warm ¼ cup of milk. Stir in 1 teaspoon of sugar and sprinkle in the package of yeast. Let sit 5 to 10 minutes until foamy.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together 3 cups of flour, 1 teaspoon of salt, all the spices and ¼ cup of sugar.

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3. Make a well in the flour and add the yeast mixture, 4 tablespoons of melted butter, 2 eggs, and ½ cup warm milk. Mix the ingredients well with a wooden spoon. Mix in the currants and orange zest.
4. Knead until well mixed; knead in additional tablespoons of flour until the dough doesn't stick to your fingers or the bowl.
5. Form the dough into a ball, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and leave at room temperature for 2 hours—the dough should double in size.
6. Press down on the dough to deflate it, then roll into a log and divide into 16 pieces. Form each piece into a bun by rolling between your hands.
7. Place the buns on a baking sheet, at least an inch apart. Cover it all with plastic wrap and let it sit for another 40 minutes, until they've doubled again.
8. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Whisk together 1 egg and 1 tablespoon of milk. (Some people use a sharp knife to slash a cross in the top of each bun to guide the icing later, but I prefer the smooth dome.)
9. Brush egg wash on each bun. (Optional but they look a lot better.)
10. Put in the oven on the middle rack and cook for about 12 minutes. Remove from oven, cool a few minutes, then move to a wire rack to cool more.
11. For traditional white frosting, whisk together 1 teaspoon of milk and 3 tablespoons of powdered sugar. Whisk in additional tablespoons of sugar until it's a little thicker

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than you think it needs to be. After the buns are *totally* cooled, use an icing bag or a plastic sandwich bag with a corner snipped off to pipe a cross on each bun. You can also use white chocolate instead of white icing. Just melt white chocolate chips in the microwave or over a double boiler, then proceed as above.

Break your fast (yes, that's where the word *breakfast* comes from) with these, and make enough to share with your neighbors or with the overworked staff of your church, who still have these three intense days before they rest.

The Great Vigil on Holy Saturday

The Great Vigil is the holiest night of the year. If you like Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve, you will love the Great Vigil of Easter. TAKE YOUR KIDS. Not preschoolers. I recommend ages eight and up. They can come in their pajamas. The service, elements of which date back to the second century, begins in darkness. A fire is kindled, perhaps outside, perhaps at the back of the church, and from it the paschal candle (a really huge candle) is lit. This candle is such a powerful symbol of the resurrection that it is present for not only every baptism but for every funeral as well, and it will stay lit for every liturgy, every service for all fifty days of Easter. (Yes, fifty! That's how important Easter is to us. It's not just one day, but a season in itself.) The paschal candle is brought into the church with chanting and individual candles are lit from it as the light of Christ spreads throughout the congregation.

By candlelight the stories of God's saving deeds in history are told, always including the Exodus. People are baptized,

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alleluias are shouted and sung, the lights blaze, bells are rung, the Easter gospel is proclaimed, and everyone is fed with the bread and wine made holy. Talk about a great party!