

Pretzels, Prayers, and the Lenten Season

Do you know the history of pretzels?

There are various versions of the story of how pretzels were created, but most agree that a young monk who lived in either France or Italy invented the now popular pretzel treat in the 600s while baking unleavened bread as a Lenten fasting food.



In that time period, a common posture for prayer among Christians was to stand with arms folded over the chest so that each hand touched an opposite shoulder. Most versions of the pretzel story say that the monk twisted leftover unleavened bread into

a shape which—accidentally or on purpose—resembled these “prayer arms”.

Some versions of the pretzel’s story go on to say that the monk named his new bread creation “little arms” and used them as a reminder to fellow monks to offer extra prayers during Lent. These versions make the connection that Latin

for “little arms” — *bracellae* — sounds a lot like the German word *bretzel*, which, in turn, sounds like our English word “pretzel”. Pretzels, then, are meant to remind us to pray.

Other versions of the pretzel story say that the monk used his new bread creation as a treat, or reward, for children who recited their prayers. In these versions of the pretzel story, it is said that the monk named his creation *pretiola*, which is Latin for “little reward”. *Pretiola* sounds like our word “pretzel”.

Still another version of the pretzel story adds that the shape of the pretzel represents the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — to whom Christians pray.

Whichever version of the pretzel story is the most accurate one thing is definitely true: pretzels have a long history of being associated with prayer and the season of Lent.

May your Lenten journey be rich in all the traditions of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and, whenever you eat—or gift—a pretzel, may you remember to pray!

Soft Pretzels

- 4 t. yeast
- 1 t. sugar
- 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ c. warm water (110°)
- 5 c. flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c. sugar
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ t. salt
- 1 T. vegetable oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ c. baking soda
- 4 c. hot water
- Butter and salt



- Dissolve yeast and sugar in warm water for 10 minutes or until creamy.
- In a large bowl, mix together flour, sugar, and salt. Make a well and pour in oil and yeast mixture.
- Mix into a dough. If too dry, add water.
- Knead for 7-8 minutes until smooth.
- Put in an oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap and rise until doubled (about 1 hr.)
- Preheat oven to 450.
- Dissolve baking soda in water.
- Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface and divide into 12 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a rope and twist into a pretzel shape. Once all of the dough is all shaped, dip each pretzel into the baking soda solution and place on a greased baking sheet.
- Bake for 8 minutes and top with butter and salt.

Yield: 12

