

ZALABEE

Middle Eastern “Elephant Ears”



On the twelfth day after Christmas, the Eastern Churches celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, or “Eid il Gitas.” Eastern Christians come to church on this day to commemorate the Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the river Jordan*. It is traditional to serve Zalabee after the services. Zalabee is best compared to the American “elephant ears” served at fairs around the world. They are pieces of dough which puff up when fried in oil, and when they cool they are typically sprinkled with sugar to signify sweet and everlasting life.

INGREDIENTS

2 lbs. (8 cups) flour
1 envelope yeast
Pinch sugar
1 tablespoon salt
¼ cup warm water
¼ cup oil
3 cups water
Powdered sugar (*for sprinkling on cooled Zalabee*)

INSTRUCTIONS

Mix (sift) together flour and salt into a large mixing bowl. In a small bowl, mix yeast and water with a pinch of sugar to proof. Make an indentation in the middle of the flour and add oil, water, and yeast mixture to the indent. Gradually incorporate flour into liquid mixture until dough is smooth. Make the sign of the cross over the dough; cover and set aside to rise, 45 minutes to one hour.

Pinch off dough about the size of golf balls; stretch to an oblong shape. Fry in hot oil until dough puffs up and turns a golden brown. Place on absorbent paper towel to soak up excess oil. Sprinkle with sugar while still warm. (*Can also be sprinkled with cinnamon sugar or topped with honey or jam (Imraabaa) with white cheese.*)

Some like to start out eating fresh Zalabee with Arabic cheese or scrambled eggs, then finish off with the sweet endings.

* See Mark 1:9 or Matthew 28:19 for the story of the Epiphany