Cocoa King Cake

We are always looking for an excuse to make a weekday into a party and Fat Tuesday is the king of them all! Every year for as long as I can remember I have made this cake for our staff at the shop. Well, I have to wait for the chocolate to temper anyway, so why not make cake? This is actually more like a breakfast danish than an actual cake, but there it is. The tradition in New Orleans is that a baby is hidden in the cake and the person who finds the baby enjoys luck and prosperity for the coming year. They are also supposed to be responsible for buying the cake next year and/or throwing the Mardi Gras party. I've never been able to get anybody else to make the cake (except my daughters), but never mind. We all enjoy it no matter what!

For the Cake:

2 packages active dry yeast
1/2 cup warm water
1/2 cup granulated sugar + 1 teaspoon for the yeast
3 1/2- 4 1/2 cups all purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 teaspoons salt
finely grated zest of 1 lemon
1/2 cup warm milk
5 egg yolks, room temperature
1/2 cup butter, softened

Put the warm water in the bowl of a stand mixer, or large mixing bowl. Sprinkle the yeast and one teaspoon of sugar over the water, let sit 2 or three minutes, then whisk to combine. Put in a warm place and let the yeast prove for 10 minutes. It should be bubbly and doubled in volume.

Add the warm milk and egg yolks to the yeast mixture and stir to combine.

Add three cups of the flour, the salt and nutmeg to the wet ingredients. Using a dough hook for the stand mixer, or a wooden spoon and brute strength for a mixing bowl, mix to combine throughly. You will have a sticky dough. Add flour a little at a time until the dough is no longer sticky, but still on the wet side. Knead for 10 minutes, or until shiny and elastic.

Butter a large bowl, form the dough into a ball, put into the buttered bowl, cover with a towel and put in a warm place for 45 minutes to an hour until doubled in bulk. While the dough is rising, make the filling.

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For the Filling:

3/4 cup all purpose flour
1 cup light brown sugar
1/4 cup cocoa powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 cup butter

Put all the ingredients in a medium sized mixing bowl. With your hands, work the butter in by rubbing it between your thumbs and fingers. Keep rubbing it in until it forms an even crumbly mixture that holds together if you squeeze it in your hand. You want large crumbs.

Roll and Rise:

Punch down the dough, then with a rolling pin, or with patting and stretching, form into a rectangle, about 12" X 20". Sprinkle the filling evenly over the dough, leaving about one inch of the dough of the long edges free of filling.

Fold the long edge closest to you over the filling about one inch to start the roll. Continue rolling away from you until a long cylinder is formed with the far edge down on your work surface. Roll gently back and forth to seal the bottom edge and stuff the filling back in the ends that inevitably falls out while you are rolling.

Bring the two ends together to form a circle. You may have to stretch the whole roll a little to make sure you have an open center. Remember, it will rise and puff in the oven and you want a ring, not a closed circle in the end. Tuck one end inside the other, stretching and pressing the dough to seal the edges. You may need to use a little water to help you get it sealed.

Transfer to a baking sheet lined with something - parchment, foil, silpat or just butter. Cover with a towel and let rise 45 minutes to an hour, until doubled in bulk. Preheat the oven to 375° Fahrenheit.

After it has risen, put in the oven and bake 35-45 minutes, until golden brown. Place on a rack to cool. After it has cooled about 20 minutes, hide the baby in the cake by turning it over, making a little cut in the bottom and pushing the baby up into the middle.

Turn the cake back over onto a serving platter and make the glaze.

Glaze:

3 cups powdered sugar
juice of 2 lemons
Yellow, purple and green sugars

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In a small mixing bowl, combine powdered sugar and lemon juice to form a glaze that is thick, but spreadable. Spread evenly over the cake, letting it ooze slowly over the sides. If it is too thin, add more powdered sugar. Alternatively, add more lemon juice if it is not smooth and spreadable.

Sprinkle the sugars in alternate stripes all around the cake. Slice that ring of joy and let the party begin!!

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