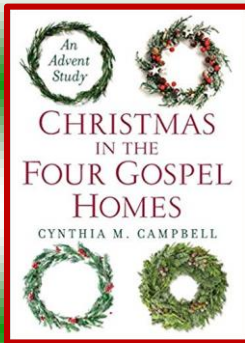


Good News

This is October, the time of lit pumpkins and costumed children, as well as spiced coffee, muffins and potpourri. This is the season of raking leaves and maybe a high school football game or two. But, if you are a church educator, a congregation's pastor or are otherwise involved in church congregational life, then you are already planning Advent and thinking about celebrating Christmas. The Resource Center for the Presbytery of West Virginia would like to help you with your planning. Here are some new resources and a couple of oldies-but-goodies.



CHRISTMAS IN THE FOUR GOSPEL HOMES by Cynthia M. Campbell (*Westminster John Knox Press 2019*) This tiny book (it's just 7 inches high!) can be a big help for your adult Advent study group. It

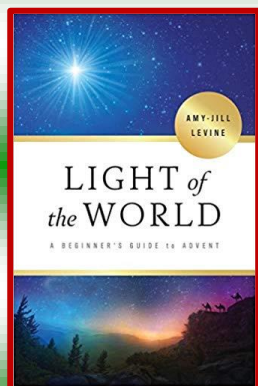


is my personal favorite offered in the past several years. The author uses the analogy of houses and homes to portray the gospel of Jesus the Christ in each of the four Gospels. She writes as if we are visiting the homes of our cousins. Each home is unique, just as the perspective of Christ is unique from each Gospel writer.

The first part of the study delves into the Gospel - how the Gospel writer told the story of Jesus, his birth, life and message. The next section paints a visual and theological picture of each home. The third section includes prayers and reflections for each Gospel home, while the last section includes ideas for

session leaders.

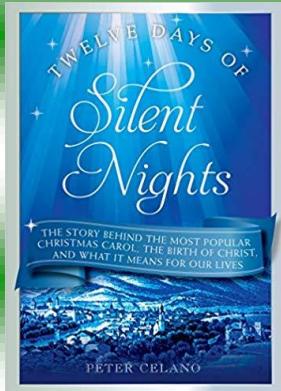
The reading for each week is fairly short and could be done in class, either out loud or silently, then discussed with no participant work needed before class. This simple, four-week study would be a nice addition to any Advent season.



THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD: BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ADVENT by Amy-Jill Levine (*Abingdon Press, 2019*) Each week of this study includes preparation information and a guide for the leader, an introductory video lasting about 12 minutes, and a book with four chapters, which should be read by the leader and, perhaps, the participants before each class.

The author gives participants a different perspective on the meaning of Jesus' birth than many of us have had before. She offers us knowledge that was

common to the Jewish people who were witness to the Good News of His birth. Sharing this knowledge, as well as the Hebrew and Greek translation of many words used by the Gospel writers, Amy-Jill Levine expounds on and gives new meaning to stories we have often heard. This new understanding should bring us new insight into the Good News of Advent.



TWELVE DAYS OF SILENT NIGHTS by Peter Celano (*Paraclete Press*) This four-week study may easily be used as an Advent study. It is based on the carol *Silent Night*. 2019 marks the 200th anniversary of when the carol was sung for the very first time. What better time to study and contemplate the words to this familiar and beloved carol? There are four chapters in the book. The first discusses both the German and English history of the song. Chapter two leads us to reflect on each of the six stanzas of the carol. In chapter three, we learn about the first recorded Nativity reenactment set up by St. Francis of Assisi. In this chapter, we also learn a little about another familiar Christmas carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, and one explanation for the verses of that carol, which was first

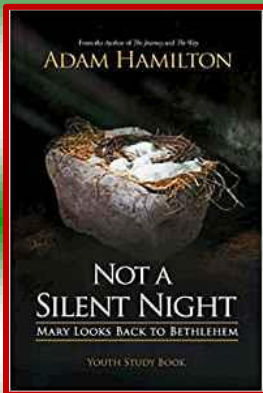
published in 1790. The fourth chapter is the longest and covers the time from Christmas through January 5 with a very short reflection and question for each day. This chapter could be used for the fourth week of Advent, or a class could take a break and come back together between Christmas and New Years to complete the study.



The Resource Center has two new children's Christmas books published by *Flyaway Books*, 2019. The first is **The Worst Christmas Ever** by Kathleen Long Bostrom; illustrated by Guy Porfirio. Here we learn the story of Matthew and his family, who are moving to California where they won't have snow and where the tree lot sells pink Christmas trees. Matthew is sure this Christmas will be horrible.



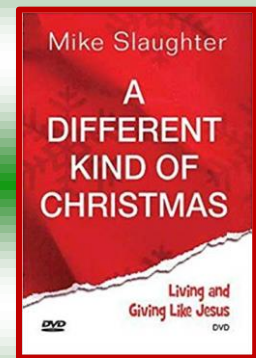
The other new Christmas picture book is **THE NIGHT OF HIS BIRTH** by Katherine Paterson. It is illustrated by Lisa Aisato. Here the night of Jesus' birth is told from the perspective of Mary, his mother, through words and beautiful paintings. As a teaser, I'll say that the first page is set during a golden dusk, with stars appearing in the night sky as the world settles toward rest. This painting could have been done using the West Virginia mountains as the model. Six words float across the page, "*Sing out, my soul, the wonder...*" This is one I want read to me as I lie in bed late on Christmas Eve.



A video study that is not new but has been very popular is **NOT A SILENT NIGHT: MARY LOOKS BACK TO BETHLEHEM** by Adam Hamilton (*Abingdon Press*). In this five-week study, we learn about Jesus by considering how his birth and life may have been experienced by his mother, Mary. Starting with the end of her life, the study ends with the birth of Jesus. Each session begins with an 11- to 14-minute video of the author, a sermon-like presentation from the front of a sanctuary. The study includes the video, the Leader Guide and a book which may or may not be read by participants.



For something different, your study group could try **A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHRISTMAS: LIVING AND GIVING LIKE JESUS** by Mike Slaughter (*Abingdon Press 2012*) This five-week study includes videos that are about 12 minutes long, as well as hands-on activities and participant hand-outs for reflection. Slaughter directs participants to be empowered to experience a Christmas season with more peace and joy than any toy or gadget could bring.



For more information or to check out one of these resources from the Resource Center, please contact Nellie Howard, Resource Center Director, at resourcecenter@wvpresbytery.org or 304-744-7634.