

= The Christmas Sessions =

The Christmas Sessions is the first Christmas album by American Christian rock band MercyMe . The album , produced by Brown Bannister , was released on September 27 , 2005 . The band , who greatly enjoy Christmas , had previously recorded Christmas songs and enjoyed the process so much that they wanted to produce a full @-@ length album . After releasing a studio album in early 2004 , they decided to take time off ; they realized they could record a Christmas album over that period and began work in December 2004 . The band , aiming to produce a rock @-@ oriented album , recruited Bannister , a noted rock producer , to produce it . In addition to one original song , " Joseph 's Lullaby " , the album consists of covers of both modern and traditional Christmas songs that the band members had listened to when growing up .

Upon its release , The Christmas Sessions received positive reviews from critics . Praise was offered for the album 's production qualities , as well as the change in direction for MercyMe and the band 's take on the traditional songs . Minor criticism was directed at lead vocalist Bart Millard 's vocals , as well as at individual songs . The album reached a peak of number three on the Billboard Christian Albums chart , number ten on the Holiday Albums chart , and number sixty @-@ four on the Billboard 200 . Multiple songs from the album appeared on record charts , including " Joseph 's Lullaby " , which peaked at number one on the Christian Songs chart ; " God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen " and " Little Drummer Boy " also appeared in the top ten on the chart , peaking at numbers nine and ten , respectively , and " Silent Night " reached a peak of number six on the Adult Contemporary chart .

= = Background and recording = =

According to Bart Millard , the lead vocalist for MercyMe , the band enjoys the Christmas season greatly and had recorded songs for compilation albums like WOW Christmas : Green and had liked the process of taking older Christmas songs and altering them ; Millard said that the band " had so much fun doing it that we found ourselves wishing we had a Christmas record of our own " . After the band released their third studio album Undone in early 2004 , they decided to take some time off , and realized they could record a Christmas album over that period . Although MercyMe had started as a rock band , they become associated with the adult contemporary genre after their single " I Can Only Imagine " became successful . In creating The Christmas Sessions , the band incorporated more elements from rock music and other genres ; Millard described it as " the most ' rock ' album we 've done " and noted they did not concern themselves with the album 's direction , saying " we didn ' t have to worry about which direction we went . We just made the record we wanted to make " .

MercyMe began recording the album over Christmas 2004 , and put the " finishing touches " on it over the following summer . The band brought in rock producer Brown Bannister , who had previously recorded albums for artists like Amy Grant and Steven Curtis Chapman , to produce both The Christmas Sessions and their next studio album , which would also utilize a rock sound . In selecting songs for The Christmas Sessions the band wanted to cover Christmas songs they had grown up with , but they did write and record one original song , " Joseph 's Lullaby " . Millard had initially written it as " Mary 's Lullaby " but changed the lyrics and key upon suggestion from Bannister 's wife , who noted that , being male , it was odd for him to be singing from the perspective of Mary as opposed to Joseph .

= = Composition = =

The Christmas Sessions has been described as a rock and pop rock album ; influences from country and jazz were also noted . " It Came Upon a Midnight Clear " has been described as being a stadium rock song incorporating musical elements similar to rock bands U2 and Coldplay ; " I Heard the Bells On Christmas Day " , a power ballad , was also described as being similar to U2 in sound . " Gloria " is a reinterpretation of " Angels We Have Heard on High " , modifying the melody of the

song 's chorus . " God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen " utilizes a " multilayered arrangement ... that sounds as if it were tailored for a Super Bowl halftime show " . The song , along with " Little Drummer Boy " , begins with a rock @-@ oriented opening before transitioning into a power ballad form .

" Winter Wonderland / White Christmas " is a medley of the two songs , described as being similar to a mix of a Dixieland band with the Beatles . " Christmas Time Is Here " uses brass instruments in its arrangement , similar to that of Chicago @-@ area bands . " Silent Night " , which features Amy Grant singing background vocals , has been described as having a country or country pop arrangement . " Away " is an instrumental piece with a simple arrangement . " Joseph 's Lullaby " , the album 's only original song , has been described as " emo @-@ influenced " , portraying both the night of Jesus ' birth as well as the night after it . The ballad 's arrangement features piano and string instruments .

= = Critical reception = =

The Christmas Sessions received positive reviews from music critics . Rick Anderson of Allmusic gave the album 3 @. @ 5 out of 5 stars , praising the album 's overall rock tone . Anderson offered a small amount of criticism concerning Millard 's vocal delivery , saying he " can can be a bit mannered " , as well as criticizing the country sound of " Silent Night " as " ill @-@ advised " , but he praised the band 's version of " I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day " . Russ Breimeier of Christianity Today , who gave the album 4 @. @ 5 out of 5 stars , praised the album 's diverse sound . Although he described the band 's influences on some songs as being " a little too obvious " , Breimeier stated that " MercyMe is clearly improving as a band " . Daniel Cunningham of Cross Rhythms awarded the album 8 out of 10 squares , stating that the album exceeded his expectations . He described the album as being " fresh @-@ sounding " and felt the album 's mix of older and newer Christmas songs would give it a wide appeal . Jesus Freak Hideout 's Spencer Priest gave the album 4 out of 5 stars , praising the album as " outstanding " and feeling that the use of instruments like the trombone , trumpet , and mandolin in some songs made them stand out in comparison to other renditions . Kelefa Sanneh of The New York Times praised the album as a whole , calling it " one of the year 's most enjoyable holiday CDs " . He also felt the band 's musical changes to the traditional songs showed their care for them .

= = Commercial reception = =

The Christmas Sessions was released on September 27 , 2005 . It debuted at number 47 on the Billboard Christian Albums chart and number 175 on the Billboard 200 . The album reached a peak of number three on the Christian Albums chart and number 64 on the Billboard 200 , and also debuted and peaked at number ten on the Holiday Albums chart . The Christmas Sessions ranked as the twenty @-@ third best @-@ selling Christian album of 2006 .

The album spawned a number of charting songs . Three songs (" Joseph 's Lullaby " , " God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen " , and " Little Drummer Boy ") charted inside the top ten of the Billboard Christian Songs chart , peaking at number one , nine , and ten , respectively . " It Came Upon a Midnight Clear " , " Gloria " , " O Holy Night " , " Silent Night " , and " Rockin ' Around the Christmas Tree " also appeared on the chart . " Silent Night " peaked at number six on the Adult Contemporary chart , with " Rockin ' Around the Christmas Tree " , " Joseph 's Lullaby " , and " God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen " also charting on that format .

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel and credits = =

Credits taken from Allmusic

= = Charts = =