

A Christmas time medley

This year, Christian music artist Sara Groves is crossing off a longstanding item from her to-do list: Make a Christmas album. O Holy Night is not only her first Christmas album but is also the first album she has recorded with her touring band. The mother of three and Evangel University graduate recently shared some of her Christmas memories and family traditions with Jennifer McClure, assistant editor.

tpe: How do you keep the meaning of Christmas in focus for your family?

GROVES: I love all of our traditional things, but I think the Advent is my immediate family's most precious time. When we started doing it, I thought I would have to drag my kids to do it, but they love it. It's very brief, right before bedtime. Every night we light the candle, pick a traditional Christmas song and a sacred Christmas song, read the reading for that day, then we have prayer request time.

Advent was sort of viewed as a mainline church practice. It's fun to take some of those traditions as our own. The Advent story covers the whole Christmas story, starting with Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. It doesn't just start with the shepherds. So by the time Jesus comes, those candles are getting brighter and brighter. My kids are so excited to light that last candle. The symbolism of it has been really neat for us. My kids get it. That's been really special to me.

tpe: What are some other family Christmas traditions?

GROVES: We have lots of little Christmas traditions — like my grandfather reading the Christmas story — but the big ones are Advent and Stocking People. For Stocking People, we draw names from a hat and all year long we buy little gifts for that person and pray for that person. Then on Christmas morning we reveal whose name we have. It's kind of like a secret Santa all year long.

tpe: Could you share a favorite childhood Christmas memory?

GROVES: We grew up in a house built in 1898. The basement was like a dungeon. The foundation of the house was stone, not even brick. The gravity furnace was this enormous thing with big octopus arms.

This one year Christmas Eve was on a Sunday. We got ready for church, and then we'd go sit on a vent to warm up. I heard a noise in the vent. I bent my head down and said, "Hello?" And there was like a pause and this little voice said, "Hello!" And I said, "Who's there?" And the voice said, "I'm an elf." I said, "What are you doing in the vent?" And the voice said, "Your chimney is broken" — which was true. The voice said, "I had to come through the furnace."

I was probably 8 years old. I called my sisters up, and we were talking to this little person in the vent. I'd run downstairs, and my dad was sitting in the chair. And I'd run back upstairs, and we'd talk for a while. Run back downstairs, and my mom was in the kitchen.

We went to church that morning, then when we came home the front door wouldn't open. So we had to go to the back door. When we came into the living room we saw the door wouldn't open because the lid was off of the heat ex-

“Christmas isn’t just a memorial. It is a living, changing narrative that we are connected to.”

Fun facts

Favorite Christmas song: “It Came Upon a Midnight Clear”

Favorite Christmastime food: Fudge

Gift bags or wrapping paper: Wrapping paper

Part you played in a Christmas play: I was Hark, the herald angel, in fourth grade.

Favorite character in Christmas story besides Baby Jesus: The shepherds

Favorite Christmas movie: It’s a Wonderful Life

change vent right behind the front door and all our presents were piled out of the heat exchange. Santa came through my furnace that year. That was definitely one of my favorite memories.

tpe: Do you know which parent was the conspirator?

GROVES: They’ve never admitted to anything. I think my mom just stumbled on an opportunity when I said “Hello?”

tpe: What’s something you try to instill in your children for their own future Christmases?

GROVES: Definitely the Advent part — I hope they never lose sight of that. I hope they cherish Jesus and the larger story of His birth like my parents have and like I do. And I hope their hearts just delight in this narrative that God has told since the beginning of time and that they feel connected to it. Christmas isn’t just a memorial. It is a living, changing narrative that we are connected to.

tpe: What does Christmas mean to you?

GROVES: In all the names for Jesus one of my favorite names is Emmanuel, “God with us.” That that is even possible is so deeply moving to me, and it bears retelling

and retelling and retelling. People have said, “Some of these songs have been sung a million times. How do you bring a new life to that?” The story bears retelling, and it will bear retelling until Jesus comes.

As a kid you hear fairy tales and maybe you believe in the Tooth Fairy or in Santa Claus. As an adult, those fairy tales lose their shimmer. But we should never lose sight of the reality God left heaven to come put on human flesh to know us. It sounds like a fairy tale, but it’s the one childhood story that’s left, that remains, that’s true. It doesn’t lose its shimmer or the way it evokes creativity and sparks our imagination. It’s a story of wonder and of hope. To me, the significance of the story is that God is the Lover of my soul. He didn’t come to shame me, but to know me.

tpe: What was one significant Christmas for you?

GROVES: There have been many Christmases that were significant. Every year marks a different feel. One Christmas, though, became just a real big materialism year for me. In that year, high school or junior high, I wanted things. I wanted jeans, I wanted shirts — I just loaded my list with things that I wanted.

But for whatever reason, a light went on in my heart, and I realized what a sacrifice it was for my mom

and dad to do all that for me. I think I had a shift in my heart that year. I remember realizing it wasn’t just about me getting things, but that on the other end of that was a giver.

I remember my mom — I used to kind of make fun of her clothes. That year it just dawned on me that it was really important to her that I felt confident and had the jeans that I wanted, little things like that. But it was important to her even at the expense of her own wardrobe and her own things. I remember crying about it when I really realized that there was a giver on the other end.

tpe: What do you hope to achieve through your music and, in particular, your Christmas album?

GROVES: I wanted the album to be the embodiment of peace. I wanted it to *feel* like good news. I believe it achieved that.

There are lots of Christmas albums that are sentimental to me. One Christmas album is just beautifully produced with gorgeous strings, but it does not mention Jesus once. To get to make this album with the Name, the Name, the Name ... and the Child and the story ... was just so fun.

It was really special to use my touring band. Usually whatever producer I’m working with I use the Nashville musicians he works with. In 10 years, I’ve not recorded with my band. It was really fun to do that.

tpextra

Visit tpe.ag.org for a free MP3 download of “O Holy Night” from Sara Groves’ new Christmas album.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



JAMES RIVER LEADERSHIP COLLEGE

- FULLY ACCREDITED
- FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID AVAILABLE
- ALL FIRST YEAR STUDENTS RECEIVE A MACBOOK
- JAMESRIVERLEADERSHIPCOLLEGE.ORG

