Michael W. Smith - Decades of Worship (2012)

01 – Awesome God 02 – Mighty to Save 03 – Agnus Dei 04 – You Are Holy (Prince of Peace) 05 – Breathe 06 – A New Hallelujah 07 – Above All 08 – I See You 09 – Here I Am to Worship 10 – Healing Rain 11 – Take Me Over 12 – Great Is the Lord

Decades of Worship is a compilation album of Michael W. Smith's worship music mostly covering the years 2001–2010. It also includes as a bonus track a remastered version of "Great Is the Lord" from his 1983 debut, Project.

Michael Whitaker Smith became one of the most enduringly popular artists in the contemporary Christian music market while also finding brief success as a mainstream artist. The songwriter was born in Kenova, WV, the son of an oil refinery worker and a caterer. He became a devout Christian at age ten and spent his teenage years around a support group of fellow believers who frequently gathered to create music. That support group split up after high school, and Smith turned to alcohol, drugs, and wild times. Meanwhile, he scraped through a couple semesters of college and began honing his songwriting skills, when led to a songwriting company's interest in his music in 1978. He moved to Nashville, where he played with a series of local bands, including Rose. He was still heavily into drugs and continued using until October 1979, when he suffered an emotional mental breakdown that culminated in recommitting to Christ. The next day, he auditioned for a new CCM group, Higher Ground, as a keyboardist. Smith landed the gig and began to clean up his act while touring with the group.

Michael W. Smith signed to Meadowgreen Music as a staff writer in 1981, and he spent the next few years penning gospel hits for such artists as Sandi Patti, Kathy Troccoli, Bill Gaither, and Amy Grant. He began touring as a keyboardist with Grant in 1982; one year later, he released his first solo album, The Michael W. Smith Project, and became her opening act. Smith's debut album garnered him a Grammy nomination for Best Gospel Performance, and he became a

headliner following the release of his second effort, the appropriately titled Michael W. Smith 2. Afterwards, he changed musical directions and began recording more rock-oriented music in order to reach a younger audience. As a result, some of his new secular material began breaking through to mainstream audiences.

Smith's label, Reunion Records, allowed Geffen Records to distribute his albums in 1991, providing the singer with a new chance to tap into the mainstream market. The label chose a two-pronged promo campaign with ads designed to appeal to both CCM audiences and to the mainstream pop audience. "Place in This World," a power ballad from the album Go West Young Man, effectively bridged the gap between Smith's Christian roots and mainstream aspirations, reaching the Top Ten on the pop singles charts and pushing the accompanying album to platinum status. This caused some controversy among his more religious fans, who feared that Smith was selling out to the more lucrative secular market, but Smith saw things differently, claiming that he was only trying to get his message out to a wider audience. As his career progressed, Smith won both Dove and Grammy awards, sent additional albums to gold and/or platinum status, and was hailed by Keyboard magazine as one of the top keyboardists in rock.

Michael W. Smith continued his musical reign into the new millennium, having sold more than seven million records and notched 25 chart-topping Christian hits during the earlier phase of his career. Recorded in Ireland and released in 2000, Freedom featured backing from the Irish Film Orchestra Limited and contained Smith's personal songs composed with classic piano arrangements. A pair of live albums, Worship and Worship Again, followed, and 2004 saw the release of Healing Rain, Smith's first recording of new studio material since the turn of the millennium. --- Sandra Brennan, Rovi

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