

members of Jesus' original Twelve or to Paul. They were the guarantors or prime witnesses of Jesus' resurrection, which itself constituted the assurance that he was the expected Messiah and Lord of glory (Acts 1:8–11). In the first century, apostles were traveling witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, sent by him into the world for this purpose (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt. 28:19–20). At the group's core—and the Church's foundation—stood PETER, JAMES, and JOHN, who had been with or near Jesus during critical experiences, including his transfiguration (Mark 9:2–9) and his agony in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–34).

The significance of Jesus' twelve apostles is underscored in the Book of Mormon. First, about 600 B.C. both Lehi and his son Nephi<sub>1</sub> saw in vision the Twelve as followers of Jesus in Palestine and as victims of persecution (1 Ne. 1:10–11; 11:29, 34–36). Second, these Twelve are to judge the twelve tribes of Israel and the other twelve disciples whom the resurrected Jesus chose during his ministry in the Western Hemisphere about A.D. 34 (1 Ne. 12:9–10; Morm. 3:18–19; cf. D&C 29:12). Third, these latter twelve disciples—as distinguished from Jesus' twelve apostles in Palestine—are to judge their own people who are descended from the house of Israel (3 Ne. 27:27). Fourth, during his visit in the Western Hemisphere, the risen Jesus established the position of the Twelve in his church when he chose and instructed them carefully in his gospel (3 Ne. 11:18–12:1; cf. 13:25–34; 15:11–16:20; 18:36–37; 27:13–21). He conferred on them authority to teach the gospel and administer its ordinances—that is, to baptize both with water and the Spirit—thus making them the transmitters of the Church's doctrine and practices (3 Ne. 11:22; 18:36–37; 19:6–14; 26:17). Fifth, in harmony with the pattern in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon records that Jesus was sent by the Father (3 Ne. 18:27; cf. 16:3) and that he in turn commissioned those twelve disciples to “go forth unto this people, and declare the words which I have spoken” (3 Ne. 11:41).

Modern revelation adds further information. The apostolic office and authority were restored to the Prophet Joseph SMITH and Oliver COWDERY by Peter, James, and John, thus underscoring the continuing significance of this office in the Church (D&C 27:12; *see also* MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD: RESTORATION OF). As early as June 1829, nearly a year before the Church was organized, Oliver

Cowdery and David WHITMER, later joined by Martin HARRIS, were instructed concerning the kinds of men to be chosen as apostles and were commissioned to select the first Twelve in the modern era (D&C 18:26–38). This commission was carried out on February 14–15, 1835, when Cowdery, Whitmer, and Harris selected twelve men to be apostles and ordained the nine who were present (HC 2:186–98).

Modern scripture specifies that “every decision . . . must be by the unanimous voice” of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (D&C 107:27). Further, its members are empowered to baptize, declare the gospel, and ordain others to the priesthood (D&C 18:26–36). The Lord has instructed that the number of apostles in the Quorum of the Twelve must be maintained (D&C 118:1) and that their keys “have come down from the fathers, . . . being sent down from heaven” (D&C 112:32). Those who serve in this office are to “cleanse [their] hearts and [their] garments, lest the blood of this generation be required at [their] hands” (D&C 112:33).

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## APRIL 6

April 6, 1830, is the date on which The church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized. The Prophet Joseph SMITH was divinely authorized to reestablish the Church of Christ on this day (*see* RESTORATION) and it may be the anniversary of the Lord's birth on earth (D&C 20:1). The Church commemorates the importance of April 6 by scheduling its annual General Conference on or near this day.

Concerning the date of Christ's birth, one of the earliest known references to December 25 was in the third century A.D. (Hippolytus, *Commentarii in Danielelem*, 4.23.3). Scholarly consensus recognizes that early Christians probably appropri-

ated December 25 from pagan festivals such as the Dies Natalis Invicti, established by the Emperor Aurelian (cf. Hoehner, pp. 11–27). Controversy, ancient and modern, regarding that date has had little influence in the LDS community (see CHRISTMAS). Presidents of the Church, including Harold B. LEE (p. 2) and Spencer W. KIMBALL (p. 54), have reaffirmed that April 6 is the true anniversary of Christ's birth, but have encouraged Church members to join with other Christians in observing Christmas as a special day for remembering Jesus' birth and teachings.

Some discussion has centered on the actual year of Jesus' nativity. Some argue that the phrase "one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh" (D&C 20:1) should be interpreted to mean that Christ was born exactly 1,830 years before April 6, 1830 (Lefgren). This view has been both challenged (Brown et al., pp. 375–83) and supported (Pratt, pp. 252–54). Others assert that the phrase was not intended to fix the year of Christ's birth but was simply an oratorical mode of expressing the current year.

Attempts to determine the exact date of Christ's birth or death are complicated by a dearth of pertinent historical information and multiple dating systems. The present dating system derives from the determination that Christ was born in 753 A.U.C. (*ab urbe condita*—from the founding of the city [of Rome]), made by the Scythian monk Dionysius, commissioned by Pope John 1 in A.D. 525 (1278 A.U.C.). The accuracy of Dionysius' system stands at the center of all discussion concerning the date of Christ's birth (Hoehner, p. 11).

John the Baptist's ministry began in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1), the only precise date in the New Testament. The fifteenth year would have begun in September A.D. 28 and ended in September A.D. 29. On this basis alone the dates of Christ's life can be reckoned from the New Testament.

The LDS Church has not taken an official position on the issue of the year of Christ's birth. Bruce R. McConkie, an apostle, offers what for the present appears to be the most definitive word on the question: "We do not believe it is possible with the present state of our knowledge—including that which is known both in and out of the Church—to state with finality when the natal day of the Lord Jesus actually occurred" (Vol. 1, p. 349, n. 2).

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#### ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeology is the study and interpretation of past human cultures based on known material remains. Biblical and Mesoamerican archaeological research is of special interest to Latter-day Saints.

Archaeological data from the ancient Near East and the Americas have been used both to support and to discredit the Book of Mormon. Many scholars see no support for the Book of Mormon in the archaeological records, since no one has found any inscriptional evidence for, or material remains that can be tied directly to, any of the persons, places, or things mentioned in the book (Smithsonian Institution).

Several types of indirect archaeological evidence, however, have been used in support of the Book of Mormon. For example, John L. Sorenson and M. Wells Jakeman tentatively identified the Olmec (2000–600 B.C.) and Late Pre-Classic Maya (300 B.C.–A.D. 250) cultures in Central America with the JAREDITE and NEPHITE cultures, based on correspondences between periods of cultural development in these areas and the pattern of cultural change in the Book of Mormon.

Likewise, parallels between cultural traits of the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica perhaps indicate transoceanic contacts between the two regions. Among these are such minor secondary traits as horned incense burners, models of house types, wheel-made pottery, cement, the true arch, and the use of stone boxes. All of these may, how-