

## LDS Perspectives Podcast

### Episode 13: When was Jesus Born? With Jeffrey R. Chadwick

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*This is not a verbatim transcript.  
Some wording and grammar has been modified for clarity.*

**Laura Hales:** Hello, this is Laura Harris Hales with the LDS Perspectives Podcast, and I'm here today with Dr. Jeffrey R. Chadwick to discuss the dating of the birth of Christ. Jeffrey R. Chadwick is the BYU Jerusalem Center professor of archeology and Near East studies and also professor of religious education at Brigham Young University. He is a senior fellow at the W. F. Albright Institute of Archeological Research in Jerusalem and serves as senior field archeologist and director of Upward City Excavations for the Tel es Safi Gap archeological project in Israel. How did I do with that pronunciation?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** You did great. That's exactly what we call it.

**Laura Hales:** Would you like to add anything else to your credentials?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** I'm just more or less a regular guy that wound up being a professor of archeology and religion. Didn't start out that way. I thought I would own a greenhouse actually. But life took us in different directions. And it's been a great 35–40 years teaching in the church. Both here and in Israel.

**Laura Hales:** I know a lot of Brigham Young University professors who spend a year in Jerusalem, but you were actually employed by the Jerusalem Center a long time ago. Like 1982 wasn't it?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** I started teaching for the Jerusalem Center before we had a Jerusalem Center back in the day when we had students at a kibbutz in the south of Jerusalem, which is still a favorite place that I visit. I visit old friends there. In those days, I was just a contract teacher. I would contract for various programs, which they needed. Often in the summer. I was teaching seminary at the time. As time went by, I kept getting asked to return and to return. And finally, after I had completed my PhD in archeology, they asked me to return for a long period of time. We moved the family over and began what essentially has been a career ever since teaching on a

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fulltime basis at the Jerusalem Center. I've taught probably 3,000 students there over a thirty year period (twenty-five programs), and it's been a great thing to do.

**Laura Hales:** I'm going to tell you how I became interested in the dating of the birth of Christ. I was listening to a different podcast, and the podcaster announced that April 6, BC 1 was not the birthdate of Christ.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Did this shock you?

**Laura Hales:** It shocked me. I'm like, "What? This is what I was taught from a young child." In fact, I remember telling the kids in my seven-year-old's class when we were talking about Christmas: "We celebrate it in December, but we know because of revelation to Joseph Smith that it was really April 6th." And I got these really blank looks on their face like, "The woman is crazy. Jesus was born on Christmas." That actually gives me solace right now because I feel guilty because I told these poor kids wrong information.

What I did was go on the internet, and you must have good SEO on your article because your article popped up, and I read it and was intrigued and felt better about what I read. That's how I became interested in the dating of the birth of Christ. How did you become interested? Did it come as an outgrowth of your work in archeology?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Primarily, yeah. Archeology and Near Eastern studies. I was like any other seminary teacher during the 1970s and 80s. We just taught as a matter of course that Jesus had been born on April 6. This is because of the great respect we all have for Elder Talmage's book *Jesus the Christ* where he takes that very definite position that Jesus was born in 1 BC on April 6th, basing it on the phrase in Doctrine and Covenants 20, which refers to the day on which the church was organized in 1830.

It wasn't really until after I finished my PhD in archeology and was working regularly in the ancient Near Eastern studies out of the regions that enough things came across my desk [that it peaked my interest]. I mostly work in Iron and Bronze Age contexts. This is Old Testament stuff more or less. Although I teach New Testament all the time, I leave Roman period archeology to colleagues who prefer mosaics rather than ancient pottery. It just happened that I kept getting indications that suggested Jesus

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couldn't have been born in 1 BC. I mean the biggest issue is that we all know Herod died in 4 BC, and Jesus was born —

**Laura Hales:** Well, not all of us. All of us who study that period.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** For all of us who work in the field, it's a standard understanding that Herod died in 4 BC and that just wouldn't work with a 1 BC birthdate for Jesus. Matthew asserts that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great. Very near the end of Herod the Great. That started it. But then the real issue became what about the rest of it? Could we say April 6 in 4 or 5 BC? And at a certain point I thought, "You know I ought to look at this and see what the evidence says." And when you start to look at something, when you finally cross over the line and say, "Let's dig this up," It always turns out to be different than you thought. I've never excavated as an archeologist anything that I thought I was going to find. It always turned out to be different once we got into the soil. This one did, too. The date of the birth of Christ could not have been on April 6th in any year that we could target as a possible year of his birth.

**Laura Hales:** When I would celebrate Christmas as a child "knowing" that Christ's birth was April 6, I would always think to myself, "Why did the Christian fathers choose December?" It seems a bit random. Did that thought ever run across your head as you began your research?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** I never thought in terms of, "Why did the Christian fathers choose this?" It was just what we grew up with, you know? Christmas is December 25th. It's the greatest time of the year. But if you grow up Mormon, if you grew up back in the '60s or '70s, or whenever you grew up basically, you grew up being told with a nice smile that, "Well, you know December isn't really Jesus's birthday. He was really born on April 6th. See here's what it says in the gospel." So we all kind of lived with that dichotomy that we love the Christmas season, but April 6th had to be Jesus's birthday, and you know I grew up with that. I was comfortable with it until in the 1990s when I started to look deeper.

How Christmas got identified with December is basically a 4th century story. After the reign of Constantine, it was about the year 354, as I recall, that the bishop of Rome decided that a common tradition that had grown up among Christians, which is not documented by the literature of the time, say by Eusebius the Church Historian, but, that a common practice would be officialized more or less. About that time he pronounced

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Liberius the bishop of Rome, whom we call the Pope, they announced that Jesus's birthday would be celebrated on December 25th. No one was maintaining that was his real birthdate. Although the tradition of celebrating in winter certainly has an origin there somewhere, and someone suspected he must've been born in the winter. But it was more or less chosen because it was a convenient day on which to celebrate. And we do that with holidays all the time. We celebrate our holidays not when they happened, but when they're convenient. It was a practical decision to find a winter day that could serve as a day to celebrate this great event — the birth of the Savior of mankind.

**Laura Hales:** And weren't there already a couple of holidays being celebrated about that time. Roman pagan holidays —

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Well, from the 3rd century, you had the birthday of the sun, which was called Sol Invictus, which had been celebrated as a Pagan holiday on the 1st day after the winter solstice in which the sun appeared slightly longer in the sky than it had before. In other words, you get to the shortest day of the year, which is around the 21st of 22nd of December and then three days later on the 25th you could tell that the sun was in the sky for a minute more if you used your hour glasses very carefully. In the Roman Empire, it was celebrated as the day of the sun's birth, and it would just grow up throughout the year.

And the interesting thing is that it works very nice with Christian symbolism. People often say, "Well, what a terrible thing to choose a pagan holiday and then celebrate Jesus's birthday on it." But if you understand that the New Testament uses the sun and particular the sunrise as a symbol of Christ's coming, as a symbol of Christ's being, it makes perfect sense to utilize a pagan day about the sun and then transfer real religious meaning to it. Since the tradition existed that Jesus had been born in early winter, this was as good a day as any. No one maintains December 25th was the birthday of Christ, but the evidence points to early winter and since there was a day that celebrated the sun in early winter why not use it to celebrate the sunrise from on high. The S-O-N of God.

**Laura Hales:** In a separate Christian tradition that was popular in the Near East, they had the Feast of the Epiphany, which was January 6th, and that's where we get the 12 days of Christmas — from that December 25th to January

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6th. That was another thing I always wondered about. Are the twelve days of Christmas before or after Christmas?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** The first day of Christmas is December 25th.

**Laura Hales:** Yeah.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** The second day is December 26th. And in some countries they celebrate the second day of Christmas. In Europe very often you'll see Christmas celebrated for two days, and then it went through until January 5th, and those were the twelve days of Christmas we sing about. The real difference is the difference between western or Catholic Christmas and Orthodox Christmas. And that's not really counted so much anymore except for in certain places in the Middle East in the Orthodox churches in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. They will celebrate Orthodox for twelve and now even fourteen days after December 25th. We have two Christmases in Jerusalem.

**Laura Hales:** We're going to go back to talking about these two competing traditions. We have the traditional Christmas for the rest of Christianity, and then we have this subset of lifelong members of the church who know that the *real* date of Christ's birth is April 6th BC 1. How did that develop? Talmage didn't out-of-the-blue pick that date. Can you trace this tradition throughout LDS thought?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** It actually originates in the 1800s prior to Elder Talmage. This is something that starts to bubble up in the 1800s in some of the Christian commentaries, which are mostly Protestant. And these are the commentaries on which Latter-day Saints were relying and the commentaries, which Elder Talmage quotes frequently. The chief of these was a commentary *Life of Christ*. And then there were other works by Alfred Edersheim among others. There's not any nice way to put this, but there was a rather anti-Catholic feeling among Protestant scholars in the 1800s and the idea that Jesus, you know, was born on Christmas was not popular with all of the Protestant denominations.

And so even prior to Elder Talmage's time, we see in certain books that wrote about the life of Christ a tendency to move his birth to the springtime — to have it coincide more Easter-ish if you will. And out of that came a lot of, frankly, myths. Like the lambing season that we talk so much about, which has no basis in reality. These were the types of

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commentaries that influenced Latter-day Saint leaders around the year 1900 when Elder Talmage was asked to write his remarkable LDS-themed work on the life of Christ. He looked to the spring for the birthdate and saw in section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants a passage, which seemed to him to give a date in the spring. It was section 20 verse 1, which says that the church arose on the 6th of April 1830 since the coming of the Lord Jesus in the flesh.

We understand now due to the Joseph Smith Papers project that that was simply a way of saying the church was established on this date that everyone understands is our common dating system. But Elder Talmage took that very literally and presented it as if April 6th of 1830 were exactly 1830, 365-day years since the birth of Jesus. He stated that rather emphatically in his book *Jesus the Christ*. And April 6th became a hit with Mormons from 1915 onward. Even though no one in the 1800s among the general authorities had posited that Jesus was born in April. Joseph Smith said nothing on the subject. Brigham Young nothing. The rest of the presidents of the church down to Lorenzo Snow said nothing on this.

There was one general authority, Orson Pratt, who had a unique count for the life of Jesus, and in a couple of different conference talks that are recorded in the *Journal of Discourses*, he is on record as saying he thought that Jesus was born in 4 BC on April 11th as I recall. Not April 6th. But no one in the 1800s was looking at section 20 as pointing to Jesus's birthday on April 6th. This is a unique contribution of Elder Talmage. While it's easy to see what his intents were, it turns out that it doesn't reflect reality.

**Laura Hales:** I've passed around folklore myself, so I can't judge. But a lot of the folklore is quite comforting like this is. So we have *Jesus the Christ*, written in 1914. And it's pretty much accepted by the general membership. After that time, did any general authorities comment on that date?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** No. No one directly challenged Elder Talmage on that date. Some people simply produced their own studies. President J. Reuben Clark wrote a very thoughtful work on the life of Christ called *Our Lord of the Gospels*, which like *Jesus the Christ* was a publication of the church in the 1950s. There he took the position that Jesus was born in the winter either in December of 5 BC or perhaps early January of 4 BC, and he didn't challenge Elder Talmage at all. He simply laid out that he thought the

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evidence pointed more toward that. Elder McConkie, when he produced his series called the *Mortal Messiah*, looked at both the reasoning of Elder Talmage and President Clark and seemed to favor President Clark's position. This was no insult to Elder Talmage. It just means that Elder McConkie did not see this question as having been solved by the remarkable book of Elder Talmage.

**Laura Hales:** But still Elder Talmage's analysis persisted over these more recent ones. Why do you think — we're in the speculation zone — that that was the case?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Oh, there's no speculation necessary. Elder Talmage's work was made a standard of church education. It was a standard for missionaries to read and to train on. President Clark's book *Our Lord of the Gospels* was used in the 1950s and 60s, but it more or less disappears from sight, and *Jesus the Christ* as you proceed through the 60s and 70s became the gold standard for learning about the life of Christ for Latter-day Saints. It was after all commissioned by the First Presidency. It was written in the temple. It was written by an apostle. It was meant to be the first systematic treatment of the life of Christ by an apostolic authority, and it has tremendous value. Even though a lot of the material that Elder Talmage relied upon was flawed material of Protestant commentaries produced in the 1800s. Now, they were well meaning, and I think infused with the spirit of Christian generosity and teaching. But some of the facts were just not correct. *To rely upon those commentaries for your understanding of Jesus's life in our day would be kind of like relying on electrical engineering in the time of Edison when we're trying to send a spacecraft to Mars. It just isn't enough. There's more that we know now.*

**Laura Hales:** By the way, I love that metaphor. Absolutely love it. Because sometimes we think the thinking has been done because it's been written about. But there's so much wonderful scholarship going on right now.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Some people are afraid of scholarship, and they think that it's bad. One of the things that I appreciate about working at BYU is that we take the position that we should be learning all the time and improving our understanding. We have now a series of books that is printed in the 21st century by modern, well-trained New Testament scholars edited by our friends Thomas Wayment and Richard Holzapfel called the *Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ* in three volumes, which relies on two dozen

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wonderful scholars to bring Latter-day Saint knowledge about the life of Christ up into the 21st century. These are, you know, on sale at your bookstore. You can get them. You can use them alongside *Jesus the Christ*.

And, in fact, there's a new edition of *Jesus the Christ* that was issued last year on the 100th anniversary of the book by some of my colleagues where the text of Elder Talmage is presented with notes and explanatory items saying why we understand things differently now than we understood them in 1915. So we have not failed to progress. It's just that a lot of people don't know we've progressed and are still relying on their 1915 editions. And in that, the misconception that Jesus was born in April of 1 BC persists, and I suspect that it will for some time. It'll take another generation for what we know now to kind of work itself into the overall teaching in the Sunday Schools of the church. But, it will happen because that's the way that we are.

**Laura Hales:** Before we proceed, I just have to tell you a little story. I told my mother that April 6th was not the birthdate of Christ, and she is getting used to me breaking down this folklore, and she's getting pretty tired of it. So she said, "Can I just think of April 6th as being his birthdate?" And I said, "Yes Mom. You can. Just don't tell anyone, okay?"

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** You know it's not going to go immediately away. And it's not a bad thing. It's just not accurate, okay? It doesn't really matter when you get right down to it what anybody's birthday is. It's what they contribute. *But if you want to know when Jesus was born it's probably going to be in December of the year 5 BC. That's just where the evidence points.*

**Laura Hales:** Let's start there and go back to the topic of the podcast. Can you tell us a little bit about how you started your research, your methodology, and then we'll do a drum roll for your conclusion?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Of course, you can read the article in *BYU Studies* of December of 2010, and it's very nicely laid out there and —

**Laura Hales:** Well, just do the brief version.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Yeah, but the brief version is that there are four or five indicators that have to be taken into account when you're going to determine when Jesus could have been born. The first one that I ran into many years ago as I was going

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through grad school and working archeology was the reality that Herod the Great died in April of 4 BC — probably in early April of 4 BC — and this is a rock solid historical date that's not connected to any New Testament literature or anything else. Herod died in 4 BC. We all know this, and Matthew 2 asserts the Jesus was born when Herod was still alive. It's that same Herod that sent his agents to Bethlehem to kill the babies there. Of course, when Joseph and Mary are in Egypt to avoid that after they get to Egypt they're told that Herod has passed away. Jesus has to have been born very late in the reign of Herod the Great, but he can't have been born any time after around the middle of January — at the most of 4 BC.

And I prefer December for reasons of giving a wider window. The reason for that is that after Jesus's birth there is a six week period that occurs before he is taken to the temple, because Mary had to accomplish a period of purification for forty days. On the 41st or 42nd day, she and Joseph go from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem, and there in Luke 2 Jesus is acknowledged by Simeon and Anna, etc. Then we bump to the Matthew 2 story where the wise men appear having come from the East. Their visit to Bethlehem is followed very shortly by Joseph and Mary leaving Bethlehem. Well, they can't have left Bethlehem before going to the temple as they did in Luke 2, which means they leave Bethlehem for Egypt sometime in the seventh week after Jesus's birth. And that's the earliest that you can get it.

Now very probably there were a few more weeks involved there. Might not have been the day after the temple visit that the wise men show up. Could've been a week, two weeks, three weeks, or four weeks. Difficult to say. Travel time from Persian border to Jerusalem is about six weeks on land anciently. And so if the wise men left immediately upon seeing the sign of Jesus's birth, they would have arrived in Jerusalem six to seven weeks later. They would have gone to see the baby perhaps the seventh or eighth week. If they saw the sign and took a week to prepare for their journey or two weeks to prepare for their journey, then you would set that off by another couple of weeks. It's fairly clear that the wise men came after seeing the sign. They made haste. They didn't wait a year or two after the sign to go to Jerusalem.

**Laura Hales:** And that's something we've heard before, too.

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**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Well, because Herod has the children killed who are two years old and under. People have asserted that Jesus might've been as much as two when he's taken to Egypt. This, I don't think, works out with the text of Matthew, that a search, that wise men are fairly anxious to make their trip to Jerusalem after seeing the sign of his birth. I would say that you're probably seven to eight weeks out from Jesus's birth for the wise men to arrive. And then after Mary and Joseph go to Egypt, which is probably sometime in March, you have Herod's death in early April, and that's the story of Matthew 2. But that's the thing, Herod's death is the number one issue. Jesus can't have been born after Herod died in April of 4 BC and has to have been born at least 10–12 weeks prior to Herod's death. I think it's very likely he was born in late December.

**Laura Hales:** We have some clues, don't we, to when he was born from the New Testament because of when Mary conceived? Isn't that correct?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Well, in my opinion, the way that I read Luke chapter 1 is that Mary is visited by the angel in the month of *Adar*, which would be the sixth month of the secular count of the Jewish year at the time of Joseph and Mary. And *Adar* would be sometime in March, k? Which means it's not long before Passover. And then having been visited by the angel it says that Mary goes to Judea. Well, she wouldn't go alone. She was a very young woman, and people didn't travel in that manner. Probably went to Judea for Passover where she meets Elizabeth, and Mary is already pregnant. It seems to me that the Annunciation likely took place in March and nine months later would place the birth in December. That's not agreed to by everybody. They don't see the same thing that I do in that passage. They think the term "sixth month" is referring only to the period of Elizabeth's pregnancy from the earlier part of Luke 1. I think actually that it's a coincidence and both things are being reported there because it's a very demonstrable way of speaking of that period of the time that is to say of the springtime as being the sixth month after the beginning of the Jewish New Year.

I think that the Annunciation probably is nine months before December as well, but the real issue about trying to find when Jesus would be born is to place his adulthood in historical context. You can say, "Well, Herod the Great died in April of 4 BC, but what does that tell us? Jesus is born sometimes before April of 4 BC. Was he born in 5 BC? 6 BC? 7 BC? 8 BC? And could any of those have been on April 6th? Was the year just

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wrong in our classic by Elder Talmage? Could we get April 6th from 5 or 6 or 7 BC?" And the answer is, "No." For the other reasons. Number one: Herod's death. But number two: Jesus has to have died sometime. He has to have died during the rule of Pontius Pilate, who ruled Judea from 26 to 36 AD. Jesus has to have died after a ministry of at least two years. His ministry cannot have begun earlier than the year 28 because that was the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius. You have that mentioned in Luke 3 that John the Baptist starts his preaching and then shortly thereafter Jesus comes around in the 15th year of Tiberius.

There's another issue, and that is that you have to have Jesus's death take place in a year where Passover is no more than two days prior to Sunday. And since we can, through astronomical studies, understand when the full moon occurred in any spring month of any year back then, this was all a matter of math and astronomy. We know that only in the year 27 in the 30 and in the year 33 does Passover occur on a Friday or a Saturday within a three day window of Sunday. Why a three day window of Sunday? Well, Jesus dies and is resurrected on three days later on Sunday, which means he died on the evening of Passover. He can't have died any earlier than Thursday, which means he can't have died at a Passover that was any earlier than Friday or Saturday.

The big question then becomes if you can pick out three years for when Jesus might have died, which one is likely? Well, you can't pick 27, because Jesus couldn't have started preaching until at least 28 because of Tiberius's 15th year. The year 30 looks very good to everyone, and that's the one that I advocate. But could you say 33? Could you say that Jesus died in 33? On Friday before the Saturday Passover in 33? As it turns out, you can't. Why? Well, because of the Book of Mormon. Now if you are anywhere else in Christianity, you don't know exactly how long Jesus lived. You kind of think, "Well, he began his ministry about 30 years old." That's what Luke says, "He began to be about 30 years old." He preached for a couple of years, maybe, according to some scholars. One according to the majority, around two according to some, by tradition maybe three.

**Laura Hales:** Pretty sure it's three. That's what I grew up with.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Yeah. Not going to be. It's going to be two. And there's where the evidence goes to. But the issue is that if you take the Book of Mormon, which is peculiar to us, but we believe gives an authentic account of

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things, Jesus dies at age 33. He's probably in the early part of being 33. Meaning 33 and two or three months. You know he's not 34 yet. He can't be 34. Book of Mormon doesn't allow him to die at age 34, because the sign of his death is given at the beginning of the thirty and fourth year after his birth. And so he's 33 and maybe you know a little bit ... Three or four months I would guess, but he can't be 34. So having this 33 year death age for Jesus and knowing that Herod the Great died in 4 BC, you have to figure out, "Okay, where is 33 years for Jesus's life going to fit?" And it only fits if you place Jesus's death in 30 and speculate that Jesus is born three months before Herod died. Making him 33 years and three months old at his death. And that's how it works.

I mean it's just a matter of here is all the evidence, and it lines up only in one way. It can't be interpreted in any other way. You can throw out a piece of evidence and say, "Okay. We're still unsure," but which are you going to throw out? You can't throw out the rule of Pontius Pilate, we know that historically. You can't throw out the 15th year of Tiberius. You can't throw out the Sunday resurrection, k. You can't throw out the death of Herod. The rest of Christianity doesn't accept the Book of Mormon, but you absolutely have to rely on the Book of Mormon as a Latter-day Saint. We are duty bound to consider that as an authoritative, real scripture.

With those five considerations: the death of Herod, the rule of Pontius Pilate, the 15th year of Tiberius, Passover within two days of Sunday, and Jesus's death at age 33, you got yourself more or less secure with a death in April of 30 and a birth a couple of months before March of 4 BC — meaning probably January or December of 5 BC. I gravitate toward December because of the notion that probably Mary had her visit from the angel in March, and would've given birth nine months later in December.

**Laura Hales:** I've read both your article on the birth of Christ and on the death of Christ. There is some overlap with the article on the death of Christ. I loved the photo you showed of a manger from the time period that you found. This totally digresses from what we're talking about, but that's another thing. We think of this wooden bassinet, and then I look at that sandstone. I'm sure as an author it's going to really hurt your feelings to say the most impressive thing about that article for me was that picture you took.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** That's actually what I hoped to hear. And it's actually limestone. They would use sandstone mangers maybe in southern Jordan but around

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Jerusalem and Bethlehem it's limestone. They made their furniture of stone. This isn't discussed in the *BYU Studies* article. I wrote a popular book entitled *Stone Manger: The Untold Story of the First Christmas* in which we more or less ... I was going to entitle it *The Archeology of Christmas*, but I thought no one would be interested.

**Laura Hales:** I don't think I would've.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** *The Archeology of Christmas*. Boy, that's got to be a biggie. But actually, it's an archeologist telling the story of Christmas and putting it into its real context. You know I point out in the first chapter of my book that a lot of tradition has been built around the Christmas story, but in reality there were not any wise men there on the night Jesus was born. There were no sheep. I mean the shepherds arrived, but they didn't bring their sheep with them. And there was probably no hay in the manger. Hay was not a way that people fed animals in Judea of that age. In the winter you simply took them out to feed in the fields. You didn't grow hay or gather hay. The manger itself wasn't even a feeding trough. It was a watering trough because you had to have a trough for water because the animals needed water on a regular basis in the place they were confined — even when they weren't being taken out into the field to graze. There wasn't even a stable in my opinion. Luke 2 does not mention a stable. There is no stable in any of the texts. A stable is imagined because of the presence of a manger in the text.

But really, the only archeological artifact, if I may use that term in the Christmas story, is the manger. And the manger would've been made of stone not wood, because things were made of stone in that land, not wood. And so that became the title photograph for the ... The title page photograph of my book *Stone Manger: The Untold Story of the First Christmas*. And from there, kind of using the manger as a muse, we go back to Nazareth and Mary and Joseph, whom we call Miriam and Yoseph using the actual Hebrew pronunciations of their names. We take them through what would be the realistic setting of the story that's told in Luke and Matthew about their marriage and their journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus and being laid in a manger cut from stone. It was kind of a fun project to do — to write this book. I wrote it several years ago after researching it for decades. It's now available, and people have fun with it and are often surprised and even gasping at the number of traditions and notions about Christmas they grew up with that they find out weren't really what happened back in Joseph and Mary's days. But we get a lot of

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nice comments saying, “I actually liked this better. I like knowing what really happened. I like it better.” And that’s maybe the fun part of the book for me.

**Laura Hales:** It would be for me, too. Most people do like the truth better than a nice story. And we’ll put in the show notes a reference to that book as well as a series of articles I just want to briefly mention. We’ve talked about two of the articles you wrote. There’s been a friendly back and forth on a scholarly level about the birth of Christ, which I find really refreshing. Because I’m sure Dr. Chadwick wouldn’t want you to replace Elder Talmage’s hypothesis with his hypothesis without researching it. So I want to say there are some other opinions out there. We’ll put links to them.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Maybe I could talk about this because these are friends of mine, you know.

**Laura Hales:** Well, exactly. We’ll just put links to Thomas Wayment, Lincoln Blumell, and a couple of articles plus this great book you just referenced. You see the evolution of the discussion. I think that’s so healthy.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** It’s what we do. It’s what we do as scholars.

**Laura Hales:** Yes.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** You know I wrote for *BYU Studies* the article “Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ,” which appeared in 2010. And then my colleagues Lincoln Blumell and Thomas Wayment, who are New Testament scholars extraordinaire, wrote a response article entitled “When Was Jesus Born” and published it in 2012 in *BYU Studies*. In which they say, “Well, wait a minute. Let’s look at this stuff a little closer.” And so we disagreed on some things. I wrote, not a response to their article, but essentially just presented additional information to buttress my own models in the article “Dating the Death of Jesus Christ,” which was published by *BYU Studies* in 2015. And we just have a friendly back and forth. It’s what scholars do. We present models for things. And I present models based on information that I think is correct and if someone says, “Well, I’m not sure I agree with your model.” I listen to them and then I present them with more evidence to say, “Here’s why I think I got it right the first time.” And it’s what we do. We’re good friends, and we get along very well. And I appreciate them very much.

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**Laura Hales:** I think that makes members uncomfortable sometimes, but it's such a healthy dynamic to have in scholarship. Checking each other. Checking yourself after someone has brought something to your attention.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Yeah, you know we actually do this in the church, and they call it correlation.

**Laura Hales:** True.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** We're always checking each other, and it's good because you know it doesn't allow us to get too far off the track.

**Laura Hales:** In conclusion, in five sentences or less can you just sum up what you would like to share with our listeners about the birth of Christ?

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** Well, if I were to do this quickly, it is my understanding that Jesus was born in the window of time that we refer to as the Christmas season. Now to me that means a lot, because we celebrated Christmas all our life and having grown up thinking, "Well, maybe Jesus wasn't born at Christmastime." It's kind of a dissidence that exists in some Latter-day Saints' hearts. My research suggests there's no need for that because he probably was born in December. We don't know the day but certainly within those weeks that we call the Christmas season. And to me, that helps to make the holiday bright.

I have a real testimony that Jesus Christ was born and came into this world to give us the greatest gift that can be given — the love of God and the atonement that is necessary for us to reenter his presence. Celebrating that at Christmastime is a great thing that we do annually. And to me, Christmas is all year long. But that's it. I believe in the Christmas season.

**Laura Hales:** Thank you for taking your time to talk to us about this fun subject at this special time of year.

**Jeffrey Chadwick:** It's very nice to be with you. Thanks.

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