



St. Peter's Square 2022 Nativity Scene Focuses on Sustainability and Solidarity

Not one tree was cut down to create the hand-carved figures



Italian Hours

Lucy Gordan



Center of 2022 crèche in St. Peter's Square



On December 3 at 5 PM, Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, President of the Governorate of the Vatican City State, unveiled the 2022 Nativity Scene and presided over the lighting of the Christmas Tree in St. Peter's Square. Due to torrential rain and thunderstorms the ceremony was held inside the Paul VI's Audience Hall. The tree and crèche will remain on display until Sunday, January 8, 2023, traditionally the anniversary of Jesus's Baptism.

The majestic 30-meter white fir tree comes from the tiny mountain village of Rosello, home to some 180 inhabitants, in the Abruzzi, very near the border with Molise, located at nearly 1000 meters above sea level on the slope of a cliff overlooking the entire Valley of the River Sangro. According to tradition, Rosello owes its medieval origin to the Benedictine monks of the Abbey of San Giovanni in Verde.



Solidarity with the marangon or carpenter in the background

It's also home to the best-preserved nucleus of white fir trees in Italy, including the tallest spontaneous one, almost 55 meters in height. Young people who reside at the "Quadrifoglio", a psychiatric rehabilitation facility in Rosello, made the tree's decorations.

This year's crèche is entirely made of hand-carved wood. It's a temporary gift from another charming small town: Sutrio, in the Carnia region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, situated in the northwest of the province of Udine and nestled in the foothills of Mount Zoncolan, famous to cyclists worldwide.

With a long tradition of woodworking and crèche carving because of its ubiquitous surrounding forests, on display here yearlong is its mechanical wooden crèche "Teno" of local scenes and traditions, which took Sutrio's great artisan Gaudenzio Straulino thirty years to build. Moreover, every September this magical town of small stone houses along cobbled streets, hosts the exhibition of wood-related craftsmanship called the "Magic of Wood". Not to mention that Sutrio is the starting point of the *giro presepi in Friuli Venezia Giulia* to Poffabro almost 80 kilometers away. Its route passes through the *Riserva Naturale Regionale del Lago di Cornino*. Traditionally on December 24, after Midnight Mass on the shore of the lake, scuba divers lower a statue of Jesus into its waters.

The theme of Sutrio's 2022 Vatican crèche is sustainability of natural resources, the importance of family, and solidarity towards others. Subsidized by the

Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, the Archdiocese of Udine, and Promo Turismo FVG, the crèche counts 18 life-size sculptures: the traditional Holy Family; the Three Kings; a bull; small donkey; sheep; and, accompanied by a second sheep, a shepherdess seated beside her *gerla* or backpack made of woven reeds, still a typical accessory of mountain people.

The other eight sculptures include two children, a girl seated on the steps leading up to the Holy Family, and a boy peering into the "grotto"; a family of three embracing; two men, one helping the other, representing "solidarity"; a lady weaving at her loom, still today a typical female occupation in Carnia; a *cramar* or peddler, who used to travel on foot in Carnia from town to town carrying a wooden chest of drawers on his back filled with handmade wares and spices for sale; a *marangon* or carpenter intent on planing a wooden board on his work bench, and the dome's angel.

The Baby Jesus, carefully covered until Midnight on Christmas morning, is made of linden wood and his manger sculpted from the roots of one of the 10 million trees blown over in the terrible windstorm "Vaia" between October 26 and November 5, 2018. Otherwise, all the statues are carved out of cedar wood from Friuli Venezia Giulia harvested by professional local foresters. Not one tree was purposefully chopped down to make any part of this Nativity scene.

The crèche's eleven sculptors are all residents of Friuli Venezia Giulia: project manager Stefano Comelli carved one of the Three Kings and "Solidarity"; Capuchin priest Gianni Bordin the Madonna and the little boy; Andrea Caisutti the bull, donkey, and weaver; Corrado Clerici St. Joseph and the *marangon*; Paolo Figar the two other Three Kings; Arianna Gasperina the little girl and the shepherdess; Isaia Moro the *cramar*;






Melchior, one of the Three Kings


Oleksander Shtieyninher residing in Italy since 1999, the dome and angel; Herman Plozzer the family of three and the sheep; and Renato Puntel Baby Jesus; all worked two years to complete their figures. Each artist was given total artistic freedom for his or her inspiration, just as each beholder of the crèche will interpret the scene individually.

The 18 sculptures are distributed over a surface of 116 square meters and under a 5.65-meter high dome made of larch with an overhanging angel. Fifty spotlights, shining down from the angel, illuminate the scene. After January 8th the crèche will be permanently displayed in Sutrio's main piazza.



Cramer with weaver in the background

 Share on Facebook

 Share on Twitter



Lucy Gordan
Italian Hours

Former editor at the American Academy in Rome and at the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, with journalistic accreditation in Italy and the Vatican, I'm culture editor of the US monthly Inside t...

DELLO STESSO AUTORE

St. Peter's Square 2022 Nativity Scene Focuses on Sustainability and Solidarity

Lucy Gordan

Torrone: The Mediterranean's Christmas Candy

Lucy Gordan

