Christmas comes to the Sagrada Família

28,000 people celebrate the birth of Jesus at the basilica

Towards 2026
The central towers have now surpassed the only bell tower that Gaudí finished

Worship
The Basilica hosts the ordination of eight new deacons

Interview
The Temple’s financial director tells us how the Foundation’s budget is managed
Gaudí believed the Sagrada Familia should be a sanctuary, a sacred place in the midst of a secular space, but he did not see it as a bunker, isolated and hostile, but as a building that engages with this city. That is why the three façades are not simply Romanesque and Gothic portals, they are altarpieces placed on the outside for passers-by to see and admire. And the perimeter cloister is not a space for monastic silence, but an area that connects with the hustle and bustle of the city, with taxis and buses just a few metres away, with the hubbub of people strolling by. In Gaudí’s view, one does not pray away from the world but as part of the world, in solidarity with the joys and concerns of those who live in it. The Sagrada Familia is not an inward-facing building, with high walls and small openings, but a symphony of light and colour, conceptually connecting the inside and the outside. It is a stone utopia, which represents the world-city (according to Marc Augé) in terms of religious, more specifically Christian and, even more specifically, Catholic symbolism.

In this context, we must ask ourselves what makes such a poignantly religious building so attractive to the millions of people who visit it every year who do not engage with, nor even understand, Christian symbolism. The answer must surely be that the Sagrada Familia is seen as pulchrum, as something beautiful.

Gaudí imagined a church which uniquely blends together forms reflected in nature (the common mother of all cultures), depth of space (with the transcendent gaze that this implies) and overlapping light (the beginning of all creation and even of what is not created). The architects who, in recent decades, have finished (Jordi Bonet) or are in the process of finishing (Jordi Faulí) Gaudí’s great project have understood how to truly express a concept that sits somewhere between humanity and divinity - this is what Christianity is!
On its way to becoming the tallest in Barcelona

At the end of 2019, the Sagrada Familia was 111.78 metres tall. Over the next two years, however, the Temple will grow to the height Gaudí had envisaged: 172.50 m. Since the construction of the first towers, the Basilica has always been part of the city’s skyline. With its central towers and the date set for completion in 2026, all eyes are on the Sagrada Familia’s silhouette: at the end of last year, in fact, it was already the seventh tallest building in Barcelona and the surrounding metropolitan area. In 2022 it will top the list, surpassing the Torre Mapfre and the Hotel Arts, both 154 metres, built in 1992 on the occasion of the Olympic Games.

Photo of the Sagrada Familia taken at night from the Carmel district. To the left you can see the Torre Mapfre and the Hotel Arts (154 m), and on the right, the W Barcelona hotel (199 m).
The central towers are now taller than the Nativity façade

In the second half of 2019, work on the Sagrada Familia continued to focus on the six central towers, which have marked a new milestone in the history of the Temple after rising above the Nativity façade, perhaps the most iconic outline of the Basilica for almost one hundred years. However, work has also begun on other fronts: the roofs of the side naves and the Baptistry basements.

In 1905, Joan Maragall, the poet and friend of Gaudí, wrote the article “Una gràcia de caritat...!” in the Diario de Barcelona to ask for donations for the Temple of the Sagrada Familia, in which he described it as follows: “It is a monument of eternally ascending piety, it sets in stone our longing for God above.”

115 years later, what the poet described is still coming true, and as of the end of 2019, almost all of the central towers were taller than the Nativity façade, which rises up 107 metres and contains the only bell tower that Gaudí saw finished in his lifetime, the Barnabas tower, located on the sea-facing side.

The tower of Jesus Christ now stands at 111.78 metres, with 18 levels constructed; the tower of the Virgin Mary stands at 110.65 metres, with 19 levels constructed; Matthew and John, now reach a height of 108.17 metres thanks to the eleven levels constructed. The other two, Matthew and John, now reach a height of 106.14 metres, a level below but also almost at the same height as the bell towers of the Nativity façade.

The six central towers will be completed by 2022. For some time now, work has also been ongoing on the pinnacles that crown them. In the case of the towers of the Evangelists and the Virgin Mary, the stone, ceramic and concrete elements that make up the bottom half of the pinnacles are already being built. Meanwhile, prototypes of the crowning elements are in development, including a morning star point, in the case of the tower of the Virgin Mary, and important elements are already being made, such as the icosaedra that will sit in the middle of the pinnacles of the towers of the Evangelists. The 1:5 scale models of the four tetramorph figures that will crown the pinnacles of the towers of the Evangelists, by the sculptor Xavier Medina Campeny, could be seen on display during the Open Doors days in September.

The pinnacles that crown the pinnacles of the towers of the Evangelists. The 1:5 scale models of the four tetramorph figures that will crown the pinnacles of the towers of the Evangelists, by the sculptor Xavier Medina Campeny, could be seen on display during the Open Doors days in September.

Tower of Jesus Christ
(172.5 metres)
Ended 2019 at a height of 111.78 m with five levels of panels constructed.

Tower of the Evangelists
(130 metres)
The towers of Luke and Mark stand at 108.17 m thanks to the eleven levels constructed. Matthew and John stand at 105.14 m, with one fewer level.

Tower of the Virgin Mary
(130 metres)
It was the first tower that started to rise higher, in December 2016. 18 of its 19 levels have been constructed and it is 110.65 m high.

Tower of the Apostles
(98 to 103 metres)
Completed areas
Areas under construction

THE CENTRAL TOWERS HAVE NOW SURPASSED THE ONLY BELL TOWER THAT GAUDÍ SAW FINISHED IN HIS LIFETIME.

THE BARNABAS TOWER, ON THE SEA-FACING SIDE OF THE NATIVITY FAÇADE.

時期

Thanks to the increasing height of the central towers over the last few months of 2019, the Temple’s distinctive outline has changed and has been completed with the lanterns. By 2020, the central towers are expected to reach a height of 130.07 metres.

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THE PINNALES
Some elements of the pinnacles of the towers of the Evangelists and of the Virgin Mary are already being manufactured. Work is underway on the construction plan for the pinnacles of the tower of Jesus Christ.

THE ROOFS
At the end of 2019, construction work began on the roofs of the side naves. They will be 11 metres wide.

THE BAPTISTERY
The basements under the Baptistry are being built on the site of the side facade closest to Carrer Sardenya.
external workshop in Galera (Bages). You would then see them placing inside the tower the prefabricated pieces that join the panels to the corners, which will represent the firmament designed in the artists’ studio; you would also see them fill in the space between these pieces and the outside face of the panels with concrete, with the arises made of porphyry in this tower and those of the towers of the Evangelists, and of blue granite on the tower of the Virgin Mary. A few days later, you would see scaffolders assemble the inner platform used to build a new level of panels. At the centre of the tower, you would see other bricklayers placing the large granite pieces at the core of the staircase, tightening the steel bars that join the steps together, and carefully assembling them. Further down, you would see the stonemasons reworking the lintels of doorways of the towers of the Evangelists.

A technical visit is carried out every week to the tower of Jesus Christ. The visit is made by the architect responsible for the project, the supervising architects of the structure, the installation site manager, the works, structure and installation managers, the head of security at the construction site and the heads of the Construction department, who are in charge of the construction, production, and infrastructure. These visits to the site are used to verify that the tower is being built in accordance with the project plan in all its aspects and according to the schedule, to check the topographic data of the positioning of the panel levels and to ensure that there is no significant deviation. The team also visits the Galera workshop to review the various pieces that are being produced at this site, such as the prototype for the top of the staircase of the tower of Jesus Christ, and the pre-assembly of the different panel levels, as well as quality controls. These checks are also carried out for the towers of the Evangelists and the tower of the Virgin Mary, as well as for the various parts under construction in the Temple, such as the roofs of the side naves, the flooring, underfloor heating and the basements of the Baptistry, which, in recent months, have been worked on incessantly.

Work begins on the construction of the roofs of the side naves
Having completed the bulk of the roofs on the side naves of the transepts, in December work was begun on the construction of the roofs of the side naves of

PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT, BEYOND THE WORK SITE
Apart from the visible progress of the construction, work in recent months has also focused on the execution of different projects.
One example is the work being done on the pinnacle of the tower of Jesus Christ, which is made up of two parts. The first, about fifteen metres high, consists of twelve parabolic surfaces containing the following words of praise: “Tu solus Sanctus, Tu solus Dominus, Tu solus Altissimus”; the second part, seventeen metres high, is comprised of the four-armed Cross.
Meanwhile, final construction work has started on everything that is left to do on Carrer de Provença (the Chapel of the Assumption, the cloister sections and the second sacristy). The preliminary work on the basements has also been started, which will enable the construction of future entrances and reception spaces for visitors and worshippers, as well as an area for the necessary services.
The construction of the Baptistry begins

As well as what has been described above, another notable development has been the start of construction work on the Baptistry with work carried out on the basements beneath this space and the surrounding area, which will reach as far as the façade of the cloister and the edge of the Schools.

Work has begun on the concrete plinths of the screens that will provide the foundations and enable the basement to be built. In order to carry out the work, it was necessary to place a fence on the pavement of Carrer de Mallorca, which will remain in place until the Baptistry has been completed.

The basements of the Baptistry are just some of the different spaces that will exist under the Temple floor and will be used, on the one hand, for the facilities that will provide comfort to the ground level of Carrer de Mallorca and the Temple floor, as well as other amenities. 

For more information, visit our blog on the Internet:
blog.sagradafamilia.org
love it. I’m so happy right now” That’s how impressed 32-year old Cecília Passriu was, one of the twelve winners of the latest draw organized by the Sagrada Família to visit the Temple work site. The draw was launched via the Cap al 2026 magazine, published last September on the occasion of the Basilica’s Open Doors day to publicize how the works are progressing. The prize allowed citizens to visit the central towers of the Temple, which are still under construction, for the first time and to climb to the base of what will be the tallest tower in the Temple, the tower of Jesus Christ, which at that time rose up to a height of 101.5 metres. They were also able to learn about the works thanks to Xisco Llabrés, an architect in the Temple’s Project department.

By the first stop of the service lift in which the ascent was made, at 30 metres, you could already feel the excitement in the air. Because

However, there was still one final surprise, which came when they climbed a little further, up to 110 metres. “I’m a fan of heights”, claimed Juan Gómara, 47. A native of Zaragoza who recently moved to Barcelona, he was accompanied by a friend, Ricardo Gallego, 29. He also expressed his enthusiasm for the visit: “It’s really, really cool. We feel incredibly privileged”.

At this point, the visitors were given a technical overview of the works. This allowed the participants to learn, for example, that the Temple is built of stone taken from quarries from around the world similar to those of Montjuïc. And more than one visitor was surprised to learn from Xisco Llabrés that Gaudí used concrete, “which during his time was state-of-the-art technology”.

Once back inside the Temple, a stop at the choir gallery allowed the architect to provide some final explanations. With a perspective of the nave not usually seen on the regular tour, Xisco talked about the light and stained glass windows of the Basilica.

“I loved the visit and going up to the tower of Jesus Christ. Now, I’m even more impressed by Gaudí’s work”. This comment, from 32-year-old Sonia Gentsch, summed up the overall feeling of the group after taking part in this high-quality visit. Educational and exciting at the same time, it left the visitors with a lasting memory, which may only be bettered in the future that awaits the Sagrada Família: “When the works are completed in 2026, all this will be even more impressive. We’ll have to come back, although I’m sure we’ll be back before then”, said Juan Gómara. There will certainly be reasons to do so.

A visit of high standing

Despite the fact that construction on the Sagrada Familia is progressing before our very eyes, the general public has never been able to access the work site. However, on 1 October, a dozen people were the first to do so.

We have been to the Sagrada Familia many times, but this has been a truly extraordinary visit.

Antoni Magrinyà, 50
Sandra Ruiz, 43

THE PARTICIPANTS WERE THE WINNERS OF A DRAW ANNOUNCED IN THE CAP AL. 2026 MAGAZINE, PUBLISHED ON THE OCCASION OF THE TEMPLE’S OPEN DOORS DAY
Do you remember?

The interior in the midst of construction

Looking at the Temple now, and especially considering that in a little over six years the architectural part will have been completed, it is difficult to believe that until very recently it all looked very different. In fact, just two decades ago, work was being done inside the Basilica on the foundations of the columns of the transept and the crossing, and the only things inside were work huts, a provisional altar and, above all, scaffolding, which occupied a space that is now taken up by visitors and worshippers.

The column of Jesus’ genealogy

Christmas reminds us of the historical moment when Jesus arrived into the world. His ancestors were sculpted into the trumeau column of the central doors of the Nativity façade.

The central portal of the Nativity façade, the portal of Charity, is dedicated to Jesus, coming to be like a large nativity scene where various sculptural elements depict scenes from the origins and the birth of Jesus. The very scene depicting this moment is supported by a thin column that divides the portal of Charity in two, and on which the genealogy of the Son of God is carved according to what is written in the Gospel of Matthew. This column was sculpted in the Temple workshops in 1895 and set in place in 1896.

The trumeau therefore allows us to trace back Jesus’s ancestors, whose names are inscribed on a spiral ribbon wrapped around the column, starting with Abraham. At the base there is a serpent with an apple, symbols of original sin. There is also a wrought iron mesh, made at the workshop of the blacksmith Joan Oñós, which surrounds the column. At the bottom, the mesh is very thick and closes the column over the name of Abraham and the serpent. The capital of the trumeau, which supports the complete sculpture of the Nativity, is decorated with palm leaves and dates. The name of Jesus is carved here, closing off the genealogy.
n 27 October, the Sagrada Família hosted a mass of diaconal ordinations, led by the Cardinal Archbishop of Barcelona, Mons. Joan Josep Omella i Omella, who ordained Jordi Avilés Zapater, Miguel Doctama Mirabueno, Jordi Domènech Llauradó, Enrique Fernández Manzano, Rubén García Lozano, Vicenç Martí Fraga, Joan Mundet Tarragó and Diego Pino Solà as deacons. Two thousand people attended the celebration, which featured 182 concelebrants, including the auxiliary bishops of Barcelona, Mons. Sergi Gordo and Mons. Antoni Vadell.

Five of the new deacons are students of the Conciliar Seminary of Barcelona and received their diaconate as a step along their path toward becoming priests. The remaining three were ordained permanent deacons. In his homily, Mons. Omella emphasized the generosity of the wives of these deacons, “echoing”, he said, “the generous ‘I do’ they gave when they got married”. The Archbishop also emphasized the fact that the diaconate “is a service, not an honour, because honour is bestowed upon us at baptism”, and encouraged the new deacons to bear in mind the role of silence, because “we live in a universe invaded by noise, and God has difficulty in being heard”.

Image of the presbytery of the Temple during the celebration, with the Cardinal Archbishop and auxiliary bishops presiding over it.
The Basilica holds the Religious Celebration of the Holy Family

It was led by the Archbishop of Rabat, Mons. Cristóbal López

On 29 December, the Basilica hosted a mass for the Religious Celebration of the Holy Family, led by the Archbishop of Rabat (Morocco), Mons. Cristóbal López, and concelebrated by the Cardinal Archbishop of Barcelona, Mons. Joan Josep Omella i Omella, and by the auxiliary bishops Mons. Antoni Vadell and Mons. Sergi Gordo. This celebration was held under the slogan “Family, school and holy path”, and during the mass, couples celebrating 25, 50 or more years of marriage renewed their vows.

On 5 October, the Basilica held its first international evening mass, which from now on will take place every Saturday and evenings before holy days of obligation at 8 pm. These masses are in addition to those that have been held on Sundays and holy days of obligation at 9 am since 2017. Almost 100,000 attendees have taken part in these liturgical celebrations since they were first held.

The Sagrada Familia parish has launched a fund-raising campaign to cover the cost of restoring and moving a new organ to the crypt. It is a pipe organ that was built in Paris in 1896 and donated by the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Anyone interested in donating can do so in person at the crypt of the Sagrada Familia or online at www.orguedelacripta.cat/en.

The Sagrada Familia celebrates evening mass every Saturday and evenings before holy days of obligation at 8 pm.

The Sagrada Familia parish starts celebrating evening mass

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A star guides the start of Christmas at the Temple

More than 400 children between the ages of 6 and 12 took part in the Sagrada Familia family workshop this year. They all made a star to decorate their Christmas trees at home.

Christmas is the quintessential time for being with those we love. It’s a time for meeting up with friends and family, to share moments and conversations with them, to give and receive. And it was these same Christmas values that were put into practice by the more than 400 children aged between 6 and 12 who participated in the family workshop organized at the Sagrada Familia. Accompanied by one or two adults, the children learned about the details of the Nativity façade and took part in game of discovery complete with a craft activity, in this case, creating a Christmas star in representation of the one that guided Melchior, Gaspar and Balthasar to the place where Jesus was born.

Thirty sessions of the workshop were held between 30 November and 5 January. They all started at the Nativity façade, where it was already clear that the children were eager to learn and have a good time together. Indeed, when Esther, the guide, asked how they were celebrating Christmas, their answers included words like nativity scene, cards, and Christmas trees, and also one particularly important one: family. And as if they were in fact a family, from the outset all the members of the group showed that they knew how to work together.

“What do we celebrate at Christmas?”, the guide asked them. “Over the course of the morning you’re going to find out more, but to do so you’ll have to become detectives”, she added. The excitement was palpable, and even more so when she showed them a book – “secret and quite old”, she told them – found in the old Temple schools building. According to the guide, the book was by Martí, a 12-year-old boy who had written about the history of the Temple with text and drawings.

As they read excerpts from it, the children learned that Martí’s favourite part of the Sagrada Familia was the Nativity façade. “When I look at it, it makes me think about Christmas, my favourite time of year”, he wrote. According to his mother, Meritxell Percerises, this initiative was the first workshop she had attended with her son.

““The thing I liked most about the activity was the workshop”, said Mario López, 8. “It allows you to learn about the Sagrada Familia from an educational point of view”, said Óscar Rodríguez, 38, who was visiting the Temple for the first time with his son Joaquim, 6.

Other participants were old hands. This was the case of Jordi Kuan, 9, who had attended the Christmas workshop a couple of years ago. According to his mother, Meritxell Percerises, 51, these initiatives are great because “the visit to the Temple is educational and they get to do an activity they love, and also get to take home a souvenir they made themselves”.

“My favourite thing was the workshop”, said Mario López, 8. In any case, it went without saying that he loved the craft activity because he was the first to finish the star.

At the end of the workshop there was no doubt that the boys and girls had had fun, but not just during the craft activity; they also enjoyed the visit and the game. They learned things about Christmas and its protagonists, as well as about the Sagrada Familia, and eventually left, happy, with a star to remind them of Christmas.
The first celebration of the birth of Jesus

For the second year, the Basilica hosts the missa del Pollet mass, which celebrates the birth of Jesus but at a time more suitable for children.

MASS

On 24 December at 7 pm, the Sagrada Familia hosted the well-known missa del Pollet mass to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but at a time that allowed families and children to take part. More than 1,200 people, including a good number of children, attended the celebration. This was the second time the Basilica has included this mass in its Christmas celebrations.

The ceremony was led by Mons. Sergi Gordo, auxiliary bishop of Barcelona. A small figure of Jesus presided over the mass, and at the end of the Eucharist, the bishop took it to the outside of the façade to be worshipped by the mass-goers.

CONCERT

Music to mark the start of the Christmas celebrations

This year, more than 1,300 people attended a concert in which traditional Catalan Christmas carols were performed.

The Sagrada Familia was filled with Christmas spirit thanks to the music played at the Temple’s traditional Christmas concert held on 30 November. This year, the music was supplied by the National Classical Orchestra of Andorra (ONCA) and the Chamber Choir of the Palau de la Música Catalana.

The two groups performed different pieces, including traditional Catalan Christmas carols, such as Fum, fum, fum. Other Christmas carols were also performed, as well as Johann Sebastian Bach’s cantata Christ lag in Todesbanden and Arvo Pärt’s Te Deum.

The concert was conducted by Xavier Puig, currently conductor of L’Orquesta Simfònica del Vallés and main conductor of the Chamber Choir of the Palau de la Música Catalana, and by Gerard Claret, concertmaster of the National Classical Orchestra of Andorra. This orchestra was established in 1992 as a string orchestra and was recognised with the Government of Catalonia Creu de Sant Jordi medal in 2004.
The Nativity façade of the Sagrada Familia was lit up once again this year. More than 25,000 people came to see it, sharing the Christmas spirit with the Basilica.

The Christmas light show on the Sagrada Familia’s Nativity façade, which expresses the joy and happiness of the birth of Jesus and of life itself, is becoming a traditional Christmas event in the city of Barcelona. This year was in fact the Basilica’s third edition and more than 25,000 people attended over the ten sessions, almost double the number from the previous year.

The sessions took place on 19, 20, 21 and 22 December. Shortly before the first one started, a group of boys and girls were looking up information on their phones about some of the figures on the façade. Although they knew it well, they said that they didn’t want to miss the opportunity to see it lit up. And just like them, there were people of all ages, both locals and tourists alike, waiting for the event in anticipation.

“We want you to immerse yourself in the Nativity façade created by Gaudí”. These were the opening words of the voice-over set to music that accompanied the lighting. It went on to explain the details and the scenes that make up the façade while the different sculptural elements were lit up. The narration explained the scenes depicting the coming into the world of the Son of God and their symbology, as described in the Gospels: the sculptures of Joseph, Mary and, especially of Jesus, the star of the show, but also of the shepherds, angels and musicians; of the ox and the mule, as well as of the Magi, who followed the bright star. Because as we all know, “he who follows the star finds Jesus”, stated the voice-over.

The sessions lasted fifteen minutes, leaving the spectators astounded and open-mouthed, with smiles on their faces and overcome with emotion. After each session, there was hot chocolate for everyone who came out to watch the illumination on the façade, and both the attendees and those who had watched it from the street left the Temple with smiles on their faces, having shared together the spirit of Christmas.

“Christmas fills the Nativity façade with light”
When did you start working for the Sagrada Família and what did you do before becoming the financial director?

Martínez, was named managing director of the Sagrada department. But, after a year, I was made head of administration.

How many people are in your team?

Sixteen people in total. Eight of them make up the core of the department, which is responsible for accounting, cash flows, invoicing, sales and tax matters. Then, there are four lawyers and four others who help us with controlling the work budget.

How does the budget for 2020 compare to previous years?

In June 2018, for the first time, the Board of Trustees was presented with a year-by-year budget of what will need to be spent to complete the work by 2026, because it is one thing to set a completion date and another, to quantify the numbers to make it possible.

Emily started that year, and to accommodate the large number of people we now receive, we had to increase security, logistics and guided tours. Also, the purchasing department interacts closely with the other departments, helping them both with requests and with the search for quality and competitive suppliers.

The legal department of the Temple also manages the legal area. What is its role and what is it responsible for?

Coordinating professional services, including legal advice in the commercial and civil field. This includes, for example, responding to quick queries on contractual matters of a civil or commercial nature, and the monitoring, advising and drafting of the work execution, services and maintenance contracts. In terms of intellectual property, this department centralizes and channels all legal requests and enquiries related to the use and exploitation of intellectual property rights and other intangible assets belonging to the Foundation, and also drafting the contracts related to this. In the fiscal and tax areas, it is responsible for responding to queries, meeting the requirements and submitting the documentation required by the different bodies of the Tax Agency.

And what does it mean for you to be part of the management team of the Sagrada Família?

It is a professional and personal challenge, and I’m delighted. Before joining the management team, I had a vision of the Temple, which corresponded to the financial and legal aspects, but today my vision is much broader and more global.

“TO RUN THE TEMPLE’S FINANCE DEPARTMENT, YOU NEED TO HAVE A TEAM THAT ADAPTS TO CHANGE AND TO THE INCREASING VOLUME OF WORK.”

TO LEARN MORE...

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Emma Marina is 44 years old and has degrees in both Business and Economics. While studying, she worked in auditing and consulting firms. She started out as an accountant, but was very soon put in charge of teams. She then completed an Executive Master’s Degree in Financial Management and moved on to management.

HOBBIES

Sport is one of her passions. She started ice-skating at the age of five and was close to taking part in the Spanish championships, but switched to competitive swimming. Currently, she goes to the gym. She loves history and culture in general. She’s an animal lover and has a cat named Miler.