News



People watch as a crane lifts the upper arm of the cross onto the Tower of Jesus Christ at the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Spain, Feb. 20, reaching the basilica's maximum height of 172.5 meters (566 feet). (AP/Emilio Morenatti)

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Barcelona's towering Sagrada Familia basilica reached its maximum height on Feb. 20, though the magnum opus of Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí remains years from completion.

A crane placed the upper arm of a cross atop the Tower of Jesus Christ, the church's soaring central piece, which now stands 172.5 meters (566 feet) above the city.

With the addition, the Sagrada Familia inched closer to being done. The unfinished monument became the world's tallest church last year after another part of its central tower was lifted into place.



Barcelona's towering Sagrada Familia basilica reached its maximum height of 566 feet on Feb. 22 after a crane placed the upper arm of a cross atop the Tower of Jesus Christ. (AP/Emilio Morenatti)

The first stone of the Sagrada Familia was placed in 1882, but Gaudí never expected it to be completed in his lifetime. Only one of its multiple towers was finished when

he died at age 73 in 1926, after being hit by a tram.

In recent decades, work has sped up as the basilica became a major international tourist attraction, with people enthralled by Gaudí's radical aesthetic that combines Catholic symbolism and organic forms.

Inside, the Tower of Jesus Christ is still being worked on. Those who wish to actually see the cross will have to wait until the tower's inauguration this summer, when the scaffolding surrounding it will be removed, according to the church.

Topping the central tower, which soars above the transept, has been a priority ahead of celebrations this June that will mark the centenary of Gaudí's death. Gaudí was a Catholic; his cause for sainthood is underway.

As Gaudí had planned, the cross has four arms so its shape can be recognized from any direction, said Sagrada Familia's rector, Fr. Josep Turull. If Barcelona's city government will allow it, the original plan also includes a light beam shining from each of the cross's arms, symbolizing the church's role as a spiritual lighthouse, he added.



People watch as a crane lifts the upper arm of the cross onto the Tower of Jesus Christ at the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Spain, Feb. 20, reaching the basilica's maximum height of 566 feet. (AP/Emilio Morenatti)

Millions of tourists visit the Sagrada Familia every year, and entrance fees largely fund the ongoing construction.

This year, the Sagrada Familia will hold several events to celebrate the Catalan Modernist's legacy, which includes other stunning buildings in Barcelona and elsewhere in Spain.

The Sagrada Familia became the world's tallest church in October, when it rose above the spire of Germany's Ulmer Münster, a Gothic Lutheran church built over more than 500 years, starting in 1377. That church tops out at 161.53 meters (530 feet).

At Sagrada Familia, a prayer verse is included at the base of the cross installed Feb. 20, said church rector Turull.

It reads: "You alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High."

Associated Press journalists Joseph Wilson in Barcelona, Spain, and Giovanna Dell'Orto in Minneapolis contributed reporting.

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