

Italian Christmas in New York City

P. O. (December 03, 2015)



Make sure you visit St. Patrick's this Christmas season. You will see an extraordinary Nativity scene set among the stones of Matera.

This Christmas season there is a special reason to visit the famous St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. From December 8th through January 6th you can see the beautiful Nativity scene from Maestro Franco Artese inspired by the landscape of Basilicata, Matera in particular. That city, known to the world for its stones, a UNESCO World Heritage site and a European Capital of Culture in 2019, provides the extraordinary backdrop of the scene of the birth of Jesus.

The backdrop is the ancient farming civilization of Basilicata, the "civilization of hands," which revolved around fieldwork and ancient crafts. Through hard labor and frugal living, these people developed a spirit of sacrifice and a strong religious sensibility.

It is the representation of a world tied to the values of family, work and solidarity. And a conception



of life open to mystery.

The Nativity is made of polystyrene covered in a resin plaster with a “tuff” effect, as well as metal, wood and terracotta. It is about 20 square meters and 3.5 meters high. The 70 or so figures, each about 27cm high, were made completely with terracotta by Maestro Vincenzo Velardita.

Their dress is inspired by local tradition and made by talented sisters Nadia and Daniela Balestrieri and Teresa Galasso. Everything was done under the supervision of Maestro Artese.

Of particular significance in the scene is a family of emigrants, reminding us of all the Italian emigrants during the last century and symbolizing the hardship people suffer when far from their native land.

It also represents hope for the future and the countless men and women from different parts of the world who are forced to emigrate. Artese’s Nativity breaks with classic representation; this is not Bethlehem of two thousand years ago but Basilicata of the past: the neighborhoods, the churches, the roofs of the houses, the alleyways, the public squares. And, as always, at its center stands the family from Nazareth.

The Nativity scene in the hands of the world famous Maestro conveys Italian artisanship, religious tradition and culture. It is “an homage to all Italian-American emigrants and the entire American community,” says the President of Basilicata Marcello Pittella.

This extraordinary exhibit was made possible by the Diocese of New York, the Italian Consulate, ENIT, the Italian Institute of Culture in New York and the Basilicata Region (Southern Italy) through the Agency of Territorial Promotion (APT).

A creche of Maestro Artese.

Meanwhile, in Little Italy a Neapolitan Nativity scene will be on display. Called the “Nativity of Mercy” project, it was commissioned by Monsignor Donald Sakano, pastor of the Basilica of St. Patrick’s Old Cathedral on Mulberry Street, to celebrate the “Jubilee of Mercy” called for by Pope Francis and beginning on December 8th.

The figures were made by the artisans of “La Scarabattola” in Naples and are inspired by Caravaggio’s Seven Works of Mercy, the famous painting commissioned by the Pio Monte della Misericordia Foundation of Naples in 1605. The Nativity Scene will be on display at the Church of the Most Precious Blood (entrance on Baxter Street), the National Shrine of San Gennaro, where Msgr. Sakano is also pastor.

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