

Vatican erects its tallest Christmas tree

Vatican City (NC) — The Vatican's tallest-ever Christmas tree, the gift of an Austrian province, was erected in St. Peter's Square alongside a larger-than-life nativity scene.

The 83-foot-tall fir was hoisted upright by cranes December 12 and anchored into place between the square's central obelisk and the apartment windows of Pope John Paul II. The pope began the tree and creche tradition several years ago.

The 1986 Vatican Christmas tree, also from Austria, was estimated to be 76 feet tall.

Dignitaries and folk dancers from the southern Austrian province of Carinthia, which donated the tree, participated in a formal inauguration ceremony in the square December 19.

The tree was carried by flatbed truck from Austria, which borders northern Italy, to Vatican City. Because of the tree's size, it required an escort from Italian highway police along most of the route.

The tree and crib scene draw thousands of visitors during the Christmas period.



LITTLE ANGELS — Amy Benson, left, sneaks a peek at her parents in the audience while fellow angels Lisa Odermann, center, and Natalie Olson direct their attention to a manger where the Baby Jesus lies. The kindergarteners at Cathedral Elementary School in Superior, Wisc., were participating in the school's annual Christmas program.

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