

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe recalls the apparitions of Mary at the Hill of Tepeyac from 9 to 12 December 1531 to the native convert St Juan Diego, a native of Aztec descent. On the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>, she appeared to him speaking in his native language and asking for him to tell the bishop to build a church at Tepeyac. The bishop was skeptical and so Mary appeared a second time that day stressing to Juan Diego that he must tell the bishop again.

After Juan Diego's meeting with Archbishop Juan de Zumárraga on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, Mary appeared for a third time. Juan Diego relayed the message, but the bishop asked for a sign. Mary promised Juan Diego a sign and asked him to come back the following day.

Juan Diego's uncle was very sick on the 12<sup>th</sup> and so Juan avoided Tepeyac as he went to bring a priest to his uncle in danger of death. Mary appeared a fourth time intercepting Juan and telling him not to worry about his uncle. She instructed Juan to gather flowers at the top of Tepeyac which he did. He picked roses and wrapped them in his tilma to cover and protect them from the cold December temperatures.

Juan Diego's cloak was made of a coarse cactus fiber which should have disintegrated during his lifetime. 490 years later the tilma still bears the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe first seen when Juan opened his cloak to show the bishop the roses on December 12<sup>th</sup>.

When Juan Diego went to see his uncle the next day, he was fully recovered. His uncle, "recounted that he too had seen her, at his bed-side (fifth apparition); that she had instructed him to inform the bishop of this apparition and of his miraculous cure."<sup>i</sup>

In the book of Revelation we read, "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (12:1). The image of Mary on the tilma is that of a pregnant woman, eyes looking from heaven to earth, hands together in prayer, clothed in a pink tunic robe with a black sash, and covered by a blue-green mantle. The mantle is covered with eight-point stars and her body eclipses a blazing sun. Mary stands atop a darkened crescent moon. A cherubim carries her train. "The stars on the image correspond precisely to the constellations of the winter sky on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1531."<sup>ii</sup>

When a microscope is used to examine Mary's pupils, the image of Juan Diego can be seen in Mary's eyes at the very moment he unfurled the tilma before Bishop Zumárraga. "In the 1970s, a Japanese optician who was examining the eyes fainted. Upon recovering he stated: 'The eyes were alive and looking at him.'<sup>iii</sup>

On the 9<sup>th</sup> when we celebrated the feast of Saint Juan Diego, I explained that the image on Mary's tilma is a code that the Indians understood perfectly. Mary eclipses the sun. They understood she was greater than the pre-Christian sun god they worshiped. Mary stands on a crescent moon, so she is greater than their moon god. They saw the black sash and knew she was pregnant. They read the hieroglyphic symbols in the pink tunic and understood that the God of Christianity had already planted seeds of understanding within their pre-Christian faith.

Mary has both Native and European features. Prior to this time, many looked down upon children of mixed race. The child of a Spanish Father and a Native woman was stigmatized. But that changed. Our Lady of Guadalupe brought two worlds together. The new unity of the two peoples and the two cultures in light of the true faith of Christ gave these children of mixed race a new-found respect and dignity.

Taken together, all the intricacies of the tilma sent a consistent and comforting message of faith, hope, and love to the indigenous population who had previously been very weary of Christianity due to the oppression of the Spanish colonizers. In a matter of months, the human sacrifice of the Aztec culture of the 16th century came to an end and in the first 8 years following her appearance, nine million Indians converted to Catholicism.

Today, when the culture of abortion has created a new culture of death, Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated as the patroness of the unborn. Mary, pregnant with Jesus in the image, “is an unmistakable witness to the sanctity of life and the protection of the unborn.”<sup>iv</sup>

“Blessed are you, daughter, by the Most High God, above all the women on earth; and blessed be the LORD God, the creator of heaven and earth. Your deed of hope will never be forgotten by those who tell of the might of God. You are the highest honor of our race” (Judith 13:18-19, 15:9d).

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<sup>i</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our\\_Lady\\_of\\_Guadalupe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Guadalupe)

<sup>ii</sup> [vivaguadalupe.org/news/ten-amazing-facts](http://vivaguadalupe.org/news/ten-amazing-facts)

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid