



There's Something About Mary: Our Lady of Guadalupe Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

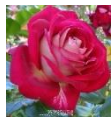


LEFT: Original 16th C. portrait of **Our Lady of Guadalupe**; in Spanish **Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe**. RIGHT: a modern sculpted version by a Mexican artist.

In December 1531, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego, a recent Mexican Christian convert. As you'll learn, the *La Guadalupeana* became a venerated image. Among her miracles, her face became imprinted on a cloak that is enshrined in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe near Mexico City. The Basilica is the most visited Catholic pilgrimage site in the world and is the world's 3rd most-visited sacred site. On October 17, 1895, Pope Leo XIII granted La Guadalupe's image on the cloak a canonical coronation on October 17, 1895.



Sources: britannica.com/topic/Our-Lady-of-Guadalupe-patron-saint-of-Mexico; catholicfaithsto.com/daily-bread/lady-guadalupe-miracle-roses/; news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/04/unearthing-the-secrets-of-the-aztecs/; mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/gods/virgin-of-guadalupe-and-tonantzin; Wikipedia; Encyclopedia Britannica; vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20020731_juan-diego_en.h.



Ancient Mexico. Mexico is a country with a history that goes back 20,000 years. Before the Aztecs, there were earlier cultures, including the sophisticated **Mayan culture** (1800 B.C. o 250 A.D. Like the ancient rice paper of China and the papyrus of ancient Egypt, the Maya (who lived on the Yucatan Peninsula) developed its own process of turning woven bark into paper. They stripped the bark of a tree we would know in Florida as the Strangler Fig tree. The Maya were the only civilization in the Western Hemisphere to develop a true written language.



The Nahua (Aztec Empire, central Mexico) flourished between 1345 and 1521 A.D. The Aztecs were the largest Nahuatl-speaking people. Although the Nahua never developed a true written language, they did have a basic system of pictorial representation. Aztec codices (folding book--see above Left) contained pages of images which were used to help people memorize information

The Aztecs believed that their place of origin was **Aztlan**, hence the name **Aztecs**. They also believed that a powerful god guided them to their new lives in the Texcoco Lake area (now the lands surrounding Mexico City). Eventually in 1325 they founded their capital Tenochtitlan. A warrior culture, they accomplished a major civilization in Mesoamerica.



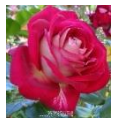
Temple to Tonantzin. An Aztec temple of adoration was established on the hill of Tepeyac to the fertility and earth goddess Tonantzin. She was venerated by people from all over the Anahuac (Aztec) Empire. Stories collected by the Spanish friars, including Franciscan friar and historian Torquemada, believed that on the top of the hill of Tepeyac the mother of the gods appeared: Torquemada explains: *The goddess Tonantzin, was deeply venerated.*

According to testimonies, she appeared to one of them at a time in the form of a young girl in a white robe, and revealed secret things to the person.



The **Spanish conquest of Mexico** (1519–21) was focused on achieving the **Spanish colonization of the Americas**. The Spaniards cleverly created a coalition of invaders. In 2 years, they had defeated the Mexica (Aztecs). The Catholic Church became a major power; it was particularly vigilant in its attempt to exorcise the native religion. A major 16th C. Aztec poet lamented the loss: *The Church attacked Tonantzin and imposed their Mary. None knew of her here. She was not Mexican; she hailed from the Middle East. Christians persecuted artists and sages. They labeled them devils, so few of them remained. Among so much destruction, guarding sacred relics became their mission.* However, that was soon to change with the unexpected appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Sourced: [.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/mexico-catholicism-politics-religious-history-pope/frances#:~:text= Catholicism%20arrived%20in%20Mexico%20with,to%20evangelize%20the%20indigenous%20populations.](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/mexico-catholicism-politics-religious-history-pope/frances#:~:text= Catholicism%20arrived%20in%20Mexico%20with,to%20evangelize%20the%20indigenous%20populations.)



St. Juan Diego (1474-1548). Little is known about the life of Juan Diego before his conversion. He was a Mexico City native; his birth name was Cuauhtlatoatzin (*he who speaks like the eagle*). He was a gifted member of the Chichimeca people, one of the culturally advanced groups living in the Anáhuac Valley near today's Mexico City. When he was 50 years old, he and his wife were among the first indigenous people to accept baptism and convert to Christianity.

On December 9, 1531, Juan was climbing Tepeyac Hill on his way to morning Mass. Even though a Catholic convert, he had profound respect for the ancient deities. He walked by a razed Aztec shrine to the earth goddess Tonantzin when, suddenly, a woman appeared. She spoke to him in Nahuatl, his native tongue. He recognized her as the Virgin Mary even though he was certain she was of Aztec heritage. The Virgin Mary urged Juan to go to the Catholic Bishop of Mexico and request in her name that a shrine be built on the hill of Tepeyac. She promised to pour out her grace upon those who invoked her aid. The next day, Juan went to the Bishop, but the Bishop dismissed Juan's message and insisted on a sign to prove that the apparition was real.

Juan was unable to keep his promise to visit Blessed Mary because his uncle was gravely ill. Fearing that his uncle would soon die, Juan set out at dawn on December 12, to summon a priest to administer last rites. As he neared the Hill of Tepeyac, Juan Diego remembered with despair his failure to meet Blessed Mary the day before. Ashamed, he decided to go an alternate way.

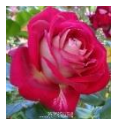
Suddenly, the Blessed Mary appeared before him. After hearing Juan's apology, she told him, *It is well, littlest and dearest of my sons, but now listen to me. Do not let anything afflict you and be not afraid of illness or pain. Am I not here who am your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Are you not in the crossing of my arms? Do not fear for your uncle for he is not going to die. Be assured... he is already well.* Juan rejoiced at her words. He explained to her that the Bishop was requesting some proof of her appearance. **Thus began the Miracle of the Roses.**

She told Juan to go to the top of the hill of Tepeyac and to gather all the Castilian roses he found there. He should then place the roses in his cloak (a *tilma*). He began climbing

as the Blessed Mary had asked, but was doubtful he would find any roses because the area was rocky and rarely produced any vegetation. When he reached the top of the hill, Juan found a bountiful collection of fragrant roses. He gathered them in his cloak and brought them to Mary. She rearranged the roses in his tilma and instructed him to take them to the Bishop as the sign he requested. She stressed the importance of keeping his cloak closed and told him to open the cloak only when he faced the Bishop.

Juan carefully carried the roses in his cloak. When he appeared before the Bishop, he opened his *tilma* and released the many roses. The Bishop stood astonished, but it was not because of the roses, but he saw on the cloak the colorful image of Blessed Mary on the fabric. The Bishop immediately ordered that a church be built on Tepeyac Hill in honor of the Virgin. Juan returned home to find his uncle's health restored. With the Bishop's permission, Juan lived the rest of his life as a hermit in a small hut near the chapel where the miraculous image was placed for veneration. He dedicated his life to prayer, virtue and the boundless love of God and neighbor. He died in 1548 and was buried in the first chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe).

YouTube: Our Lady of Guadalupe



1. Traditional Mexican Song: *La Guadalupana*, Spanish with English subtitles. You'll find a discussion of this famous song in the following notes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpGkiyQzQ1Y> **3:40 Min.**

2. Presentation: The Shrine of Our Lady and the 2 Basilicas on Tepeyac Hill

An earnest young man takes us inside the Basilicas (there are two Basilicas on the same site). He then walks up the Tepeyac Hill to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftfzGNTaDYc> **3:50 min.**

3. The Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe

This final presentation is almost overwhelming. You'll see the immense crowd at the Basilica, dances in traditional Aztec garb, and more. The devotion is amazing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8-9Atbj2HI> **9:59 Min.**

Note on Song: *La Guadalupana*

The song pays homage to the Virgin and acknowledges Juan's successful mission. Each verse offers a statement followed by a refrain that is repeated 3 or 4 times. The song explains that on one beautiful morning, the Virgin of Guadalupe descended from heaven. Her arrival brought happiness, light, harmony & freedom -to all of the **Anáhuac**. *La Guadalupana* is in the bones & beliefs of Mexican people.



MEDITATION SUGGESTIONS



1. Image of the Our Lady of Guadalupe. The

Miraculous Image preserved in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe shows a woman with native features and dress. She is supported by an angel whose wings are reminiscent of one of the major gods of the traditional religion of that area. The moon is beneath her feet and her blue mantle is covered with gold stars. The black girdle about her waist signifies that she is pregnant. Thus, the image graphically depicts the fact that Christ is to be "born" again among the peoples of the New World. Consider the Miraculous Image on the Tilma on the next page. Contemplate what it

might mean to you if you were to receive Our Lady of Guadalupe in a vision. What intrigues you about her? Her love for the Mexican people, her kindness to Juan Diego, her insistence that she be revered? Spend e time with her.



The Blue-Green on her Mantle. She was a Queen for she wears the color of royalty. **The Black Cross on the Brooch at her Neck.** Although it is difficult to see in this picture, her God was that of the \Spanish Missionaries, Jesus Christ her son. **The Black Belt.** She was with child for she wore the Aztec Maternity Belt. **Four-Petal Flower Over the Womb.** She was the "Mother of God." The flower was a special symbol of life, movement and deity-the center of the universe. **Her hands are joined in prayer.** She was not God but clearly there was one greater than Her and she pointed her finger to the cross on her brooch. **The design on her rose-colored garment suggests that she is the "Queen of the Earth"** for she is wearing a map of Mexico telling the Indians exactly where the apparition took place.

Scientific Information. The image shows no sign of deterioration after 450 years! The tilma or cloak of Juan Diego on which the image of Our Lady has been imprinted, is a coarse fabric made from the threads of the maguey cactus. This fiber disintegrates within 20-60 years! There is no under sketch, no sizing and no protective over-varnish on the image.

Microscopic examination revealed that there were no brush strokes. The image seems to increase in size and change colors due to an unknown property of the surface and substance of which it is made. According to Kodak of Mexico, the image is smooth and feels like a modern day photography. However, the image appeared 300 years before the invention of photography. The stars on Our Lady's Mantle coincide with the constellation in the sky on December 12, 1531. All who have scientifically examined the image of Our Lady over the centuries confess that its properties are absolutely unique and so inexplicable in human terms that the image can only be supernatural! **Source: / /olg.cc/about/about-our-patroness/our-ladys-image-on-the-tilma/.**

2. YouTube. Choose any of the 3 YouTube presentations. Do a guided visual and jot down what you're seeing and experiencing? What impresses you? Confuses you? Moves you? Can you sense the devotion of the Mexican people? Do you believe in miracles?

3. His Holiness John Paul II visited Mexico and performed the mass at the Basilica during his first foreign trip as Pope in January 1979. As part of the Mass, he offered a prayer. Here is the link. <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/hispanic-latino/resources/upload/our-lady-of-guadalupe-jp-II-prayer.pdf> How did you respond to the prayer? Did any part of it move you? If you are intrigued by the Pope's visits, you can find visuals of it on YouTube.