



# Mary Visits Her Children: Our Lady of Guadalupe

Women of Grace® is under the patronage of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The first known apparition to occur in the Americas, Pope John Paul II named Our Lady of Guadalupe “Empress of the Americas.” Through her appearances to Juan Diego, the Blessed Mother teaches us much about spiritual motherhood and the call of women in the world.

It was a chilly December morning that ninth day of the month in 1531. Juan Diego was making his way from his home in the village of Tolpetlac to Tlatilolco, the Aztec capital, to continue his studies of the Christian faith. It was not an unusual walk for him, however. Most days he hastily walked this path to attend daily Mass. It was one way he could show his gratitude to God for all of the blessings he had received. Even though he still mourned his deceased wife, Maria Lucia, he remembered

with thanksgiving the day they had become Christians just six years before. The baptismal water that poured over them physically was but a symbol of the divine life flowing into their souls. They had been so happy together, their only sadness that they had no children. Juan thought of his uncle, Juan Bernardino, and was thankful that he still had family.

Juan was quickly approaching Tepeyac Hill, one of the main mile-markers on his journey to Tlatilolco. He was always happy to get to this point of the trip — over the hill, across the causeway, and he would be there. Juan’s expression darkened, though, as he thought of the pagan rites of human sacrifice that still took place in the capital city, even though his land was now in the hands of Christian leaders. In spite of the Franciscan missionaries’ best efforts, conversion was slow among the superstitious and fearful Aztec people, and the bloody human sacrifices continued in an effort to appease their pagan gods. Every year, twenty thousand men, women and children had their beating hearts ripped out in sacrifice to Quetzalcoatl, the “feathered serpent” god. Yes, the beauty of the city certainly did not reflect the horror of the Aztec sacrifices.

The sun was just beginning to break through the night clouds, and as Juan Diego approached the base of the hill, the most melodic of sounds broke the reverie of his thoughts. It was as if the most glorious birds of his country had all come together at once to lift a song to the heavens. When the singing quieted, the music echoed throughout the hillside. Juan shook his head. “What can I be hearing?” he wondered. The singing had a quality all its own, like nothing of this earth yet altogether real.

As he looked east to the top of the hill to find the source of the music, he heard someone calling his name saying, “Juan Diego, Juan Diegito.” He climbed the hill in the direction of the voice and found himself facing a beautiful maiden who beckoned him to come closer. Joy flooded his heart as he approached her, and her beauty and splendor all but overcame him. He immediately knew who she was. When the maiden asked him where he was going, he called her, “My Lady, my Queen, my Little Girl.”

Then the lovely Lady spoke to him in earnest. “Know for sure my dearest, littlest, and youngest son, that I am the perfect and ever Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the God of truth ... I want very much to have a little house built here for me, in which I will show Him, I will exalt Him, I will make Him manifest. I will give Him to the people in all my personal love, in my compassion, in my help, in my protection: because I am truly your merciful Mother, yours and all the people ... who love me, those who seek me, those who trust in me. Here I will hear their weeping, their complaints, and heal all their



sorrows...” Our Lady continued to address Juan and entrusted him to bring her request to Bishop Zumarraga of the Franciscans.

Juan Diego left immediately to fulfill Our Lady’s request. After waiting all day, however, the bishop dismissed him thinking the little Indian was fabricating the story. Certain he would never return, Bishop Zumarraga told him to come back in a few days. Juan Diego’s failure pierced him deeply. Disappointed and dejected, he went directly to the Beautiful Maiden on Tepeyac Hill and suggested to her that she ask someone more suitable to be her emissary. With tender love, Our Lady consoled and encouraged him, and then sent him back to the bishop. This time she instructed him to tell the bishop her name. Juan Diego agreed.

The following day was Sunday. After Mass and religious instruction, Juan Diego hurried to the bishop’s residence to again present the Beautiful Maiden’s request. This time the bishop interrogated him thoroughly and asked for more evidence to prove the Lady’s identity. Confident Our Lady would comply, the faithful little Indian left the bishop’s residence and went to tell the Beautiful Maiden. Our Lady received the news with equanimity. “That is fine, my youngest and dearest son; you will return here tomorrow so that you may take the sign he asked for.”

But when Juan Diego arrived home, his uncle Juan Bernardino was seriously ill, and it seemed his death was imminent. The uncle begged Juan to go to Tlatilolco the next day to bring a priest to hear his confession. Juan agreed and early the following morning he set off to fulfill his uncle’s wish. Concerned he would meet the Beautiful Lady and be detained if he went his usual route, he took a different way around Tepeyak Hill.

However, it is hard to fool one’s mother! The Queen of Heaven had been watching for Juan Diego. She came down the hill and stood in front of him, blocking his way. Shamefaced, the little Indian told her why he had tried to avoid her, and promised he would visit the bishop the very next day. After listening intently, the Beautiful Maiden said to Juan, “Am I not your Mother? Are you not under my shadow and protection? Am I not the source of your joy? Are you not in the folds of my mantle, in the crossing of my arms? Do you need anything more? Do not let your uncle’s illness worry you, because he will not die now. You may be certain that he is well already.”

Relieved, Juan Diego begged Our Lady to provide the sign for the bishop so he could take it to him at once. The Blessed Virgin instructed him to go to the top of the hill. There he would discover beautiful flowers to collect in his tilma and bring to her. Juan knew the top of the hill was no place for flowers to grow. It was December, and the area was craggy and filled with thorns and mesquite bushes. But he obeyed, and when he arrived he found a glorious profusion of Castilian roses blooming there. Gathering as many as his apron could hold, he brought them down to the Virgin who carefully arranged them and instructed him to take them to the bishop.

When Juan arrived at the bishop’s residence with his precious cargo, however, he was greeted most unfavorably. The bishop’s servants ignored him, then taunted him, and ultimately harassed him to find out what he was guarding. Roughly they poked at him and grabbed at his garment, hoping to sneak a peek at his treasure. Finally they succeeded. When they saw the glorious roses, they were overcome by their scent and beauty and attempted to steal them from Juan Diego. However, when they reached into the tilma, the flowers changed from living blooms to painted ones, seemingly inked onto the apron’s fabric. Stunned, they went to the bishop to tell him Juan Diego was waiting to see him.

Upon entering the room, Juan immediately prostrated himself before Bishop Zumarraga. He then opened his tilma and the precious flowers tumbled to the floor. Immediately the bishop and all of those present fell to their knees. As the flowers cascaded from the apron, the perfect image of the Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary, Mother of God, began to appear on the humble cactus-fiber apron that Juan Diego wore. With supernatural precision and exactness, the likeness of Juan Diego’s Beautiful Maiden developed before their very eyes.

As soon as Juan Diego pointed out where the Blessed Lady wanted her chapel to be built, he left to see his sick uncle. Accompanied by a great crowd of people, Juan Diego arrived at Juan Bernardino’s house to find him healthy and well. The uncle told his nephew that a Beautiful Maiden appeared to him, healed him, and told him to tell the bishop how he had been cured.

He was also to tell the bishop the proper name for her image. Using his native tongue of Nahuatl, the Virgin said her name was “Coatlaxopeuh” (pronounced “quatlasupe”). Her name sounded remarkably like “Guadalupe,” the name of a famous Spanish image of the Blessed Mother. In Nahuatl, however, “coatlxopeuh” means “The One Who Crushes the Serpent.”

Within a few years, the “feather serpent” was indeed crushed. Human sacrifice ceased, and nine million Aztec Indians converted to the Christian faith — the most conversions in the shortest period of time in the history of Christianity. Our Blessed Mother, Star of Evangelization, dressed as an Aztec princess, bore Jesus Christ to the New World and brought the New World to Jesus Christ.

Nearly 500 years later, Juan Diego’s famous tilma, with the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe still clearly visible, hangs in the basilica built to honor her in Mexico City. Replete with religious symbolism, the tilma defies scientific explanation. Some international experts have called it a “living image” because it remains intact though it should have disintegrated centuries ago. For those who believe, Our Lady’s image on the tilma of Juan Diego remains an on-going sign of a mother’s love for her children.