

Our Lady of Guadalupe

The Image of Our Lady of Guadalupe presents the Catholic Faith in a way that was immediately understood and accepted by the native Mexican Indians. It is impossible to describe fully the rich symbolism contained on the Tilma of Juan Diego because every detail of color and of form carries a theological message.

Our Lady's **hair**, parted in the middle and hanging loosely, indicates she is a virgin maiden.

Scientific analysis has shown **reflections** of people in the Virgin's **eyes**, just as any human eye would reflect. There are 13 total figures (including Juan Diego and Bishop Zumárraga) that form two scenes in both eyes.

One can **see a cross** in the center of the medallion that she carries on the upper part of her dress. This manifests her consecration to her Son Jesus, whose cross reminds us of both His total sacrifice for love and the moment when he gives us Mary as our Mother.

The symbol of the Cross was seen on the sails of the Spaniards' ships.

The Virgin's identity as a woman of heaven and earth is affirmed by her **garments' colors and decorations**: her reddish tunic is the color symbolic of earth, while the star-speckled green-blue mantle symbolizes the heavens. The mantle's color indicates her royalty, since only the Aztec emperors could wear cloaks of that color. The Virgin, Queen of heaven and earth, points us toward the truth that God is love, and mankind is the recipient of His love.

The **8-petaled flowers** symbolize the day of new creation. The 'blossom' is in the form of a hill, and the stem is presented as a river. The "hill-water" represented the concept of civilization. The 'hill' represents the highest point of encounter between God and man. **Viewed upside down**, the flower/stem takes the form of a heart – source of life, which belongs to and has its origin in God.

Our Lady's appearance is mestiza, both **Aztec and Spanish**, showing the two cultures coming together at this point in history.



Our Lady stands on the moon. The crescent moon symbolized the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent moon god. She has clearly crushed and defeated him. **The Virgin's shoe**, which appears over the moon, has no color, but is simply the raw tilma. This is inexplicable.

An angel with eagle's wings supports the Mother of God. The eagle was the "bird of the sun." Here the angel is the messenger of the Virgin. The angel wears both a tunic of the same color and a brooch like hers. The angel holds her mantle in one hand and the robe with the other, signifying the Son she bears is from both heaven and earth.

The stars on her mantle signify **she comes from heaven** - the Queen of Heaven. The **constellations** are in the **exact position as appeared** before dawn on the morning of December 12, 1531.

Her **hands are joined in prayer** and, therefore, she is not God but clearly there is one greater than she, and she points her finger to the cross on her brooch.

The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe depicts a **dark ribbon above her womb**, indicating that she is a woman anticipating the birth of God's only Son. The Spanish expression is encinta, "adorned with ribbon."

In the **center of her tunic, overlying her womb**, is a four petal jasmine flower which is the sign of the Divine and the center of the cosmic order to the Aztec. The Virgin's Baby, Jesus, is Divine and the true center of the universe.

The **4-petaled flowers** with leaves on her tunic symbolize to the Aztecs that the fifth-age, the Age of Peace, has begun.

The Virgin of Guadalupe is shown **among the clouds**, representing her divine origin.

Our Lady **stands in front of the sun**. The sun symbolized the greatest Aztec god - Huitzilopochtli. She announces the God who is greater than their sun god.



SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Mother of America

The well authenticated story of the five apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary is briefly related here:

1st Apparition: At dawn on December 9, 1531, Juan Diego, an Aztec convert, was going to Tlatelolco to attend catechism class and Holy Mass. As he was passing Tepeyac Hill, he saw birds on the summit and heard the strains of celestial music. Filled with wonder, he stopped. Then he heard a feminine voice asking him to ascend. When he reached the top he saw the Blessed Virgin Mary standing in the midst of a glorious light, in heavenly splendor. The beauty of her youthful countenance and her look of loving kindness filled Juan Diego with unspeakable happiness as he listened to the words which she spoke to him in his native language. She told him she was the perfect and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God, and made known to him her desire that a shrine be built there where she could demonstrate her love, her compassion and her protection. "For I am your merciful Mother", she said, "to you and to all mankind who love me and trust in me and invoke my help. Therefore, go to the dwelling of the Bishop in Mexico City and say that the Virgin Mary sent you to make known to him her great desire."

2nd Apparition: The Bishop was reluctant to believe Juan Diego's story. Juan returned to Tepeyac Hill where he found the Blessed Virgin waiting for him, and told her of his failure. She bade him return to the Bishop the next day and repeat her wishes.

3rd Apparition: The Bishop then requested that the Lady give him a sign. Juan reported that evening and she promised to grant his petition on the following morning. But Juan was prevented from coming because of a sudden and severe illness of his uncle, Juan Bernardino.

4th Apparition: Two days later, on December 12, as he was going to the Church at Tlatelolco in order to bring a priest to his dying uncle, Juan Diego was stopped by the Lady, who had come down from Tepeyac Hill to meet him in the road. She listened quietly to Juan's excuse for not having kept his appointment with her the day before. When he had finished speaking she said, "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? Is there anything else you need? Do not fear for your uncle for he is not going to die. Be assured... he is already well."

Having heard these words, Juan Diego rejoiced and asked for the sign he was to take to the Bishop. He was told to climb to the top of the hill where she had spoken to him on three previous occasions. She said he would find many flowers blooming there which he was to cut and bring to her. Juan Diego did as he was told though he knew no flowers had ever bloomed before on the stony summit. He discovered a marvelous garden of dew-fresh blossoms which he cut as she had asked. Placing them in his rough cloak, or tilma, he brought the flowers to the Lady who rearranged them and told him to take them to the Bishop; that this was the sign to persuade him to carry out her wishes.

When Juan Diego, radiantly happy, stood before Bishop Fray Juan de Zumárraga and told him of the fourth encounter with the Lady, he opened his tilma to show the Bishop the sign; the flowers cascaded to the floor - but to the astonishment of the Bishop and Juan Diego, there appeared upon the coarse fabric of Juan Diego's mantle a marvelously wrought, exquisitely colored portrait of the Blessed Virgin, just as Juan Diego had previously described her.

5th Apparition: Earlier that same day, December 12, she had also appeared to Juan's uncle, Juan Bernardino, and restored him to health as she had told Juan Diego. Juan Diego was at that time fifty-seven years old; his uncle was sixty-eight. Both had been among the first of the natives to be baptized into the true faith several years before.



The Name of Guadalupe

Juan Bernardino told his nephew the Blessed Virgin had ordered him to relate to the Bishop in what miraculous manner she had cured him. She also told Juan Bernardino her image was to be known as "Santa Maria de Guadalupe" and thus she has been venerated by this title for nearly five centuries.

The Mantle of Juan Diego

The mantle or tilma on which the Sacred Image of the Blessed Virgin is imprinted is handwoven from the fibers of the Maguay cactus, a fabric which has a life span of little more than thirty years. It is six-and-a-half feet long by forty-two inches wide and has a seam running down the middle.



The Sacred Image

Directly on this rough, burlap-like material is the exquisitely delicate figure of Our Lady, four feet, eight inches in height. This authentic portrait of the Virgin Mary has remained fresh and lovely for nearly five centuries and may be viewed today at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City where it occupies the place of honor above and behind the main altar.

The Codex

The Sacred Image is a codex, or picture writing; every detail is symbolic. She is brighter than the sun; her foot rests upon the moon; the stars on her mantle are in the same relative configurations as the stars in the heavens on the morning of December 12, 1531; the northern constellations on her right - the southern constellations on her left. Further, the golden filigree over her rose colored gown matches the topography of the Mexican lands once ruled by the Aztecs.

WORDS OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE TO JUAN DIEGO

"Know for certain, least of my sons, that I am the perfect and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God through Whom everything lives, the Lord of all things near and far, the Master of heaven and earth. It is my earnest wish that a temple be built here to my honor. Here I will demonstrate, I will exhibit, I will give all my love, my compassion, my help and my protection to the people. I am your merciful mother, the merciful mother of all of you who live united in this land, and of all mankind, of all those who love me, of those who cry to me, of those who seek me, of those who have confidence in me. Here I will hear their weeping, their sorrow, and will remedy and alleviate all their multiple sufferings, necessities and misfortunes."