

The Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe

On December 12, we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas. Here is the story of how she revealed herself to a devout Mexican man whom we now know as St. Juan Diego.



St. Juan Diego, a native of Mexico, was born in 1474 and given the name *Cuauhtlatoatzin*. At his Baptism, which took place around 1525, he received the Christian name Juan Diego. On December 9, 1531, while he was walking to Mass, Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego at Tepeyac Hill, north-west of what is now

Mexico City. Her appearance was that of a *mestizo* woman in both features and dress and she spoke to Juan Diego in his own language. Mary asked “Juanito” to go to the local bishop and request that he build a church on the site of her appearance. The bishop, reluctant to believe Juan Diego, asked for a sign.

Before Juan Diego could return to the hill, he learned that his uncle was dying. Concerned that he would die without the grace of the last Sacraments, Juan Diego hurried to bring a priest to his dying uncle’s bedside. However, Mary met him on his route, told him that his uncle had been cured, and instructed Juan Diego to return to the hill to gather flowers as a sign for the bishop. Though it was out of season, he found roses, wrapped them in his cloak, or *tilma*, and returned to the bishop. When Juan Diego unfolded his tilma, the roses fell out, and both he and the bishop were astounded to

discover the image of Mary on the cloak looking exactly as Juan Diego had described her.

The tilma that bore Mary’s image soon became an object of veneration. In 1533 a small chapel was built on the site of the apparitions to house the cloak with its miraculous image. Today, just below Tepeyac Hill stands the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe where the tilma can be seen just as it was seen by the bishop in 1531. The church is a triumph of contemporary architecture incorporating many facets of Mexican culture and spirituality, and it creates a warm, prayerful, and welcoming environment. Pilgrims, on foot or on their knees, often bearing roses, slowly process to the enshrined image. They come to ask favors of the merciful Mother or to give thanks for her tender and compassionate response to their prayers. A moving walkway for pedestrians is set behind and beneath the sanctuary so that pilgrims can get a closer look at the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe displayed on the sanctuary wall. Despite the constant river of pilgrims, the shrine is quiet and meditative. The crowds are not a distraction to those who come to worship in the body of the basilica. . . .

Mary appeared at Tepeyac as a young, pregnant woman of indigenous descent. She revealed herself as Mary, the true Mother of God, a merciful mother who listens to the suffering of her people and consoles them all. As her image was imprinted on Juan Diego’s tilma, so Mary becomes imprinted in the deepest recesses of the hearts of all who come to her. Under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mary is the patroness of the Americas. There are millions of Catholics in the United States whose devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe and regard for St. Juan Diego help keep our faith and commitment to evangelization alive. The feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated on December 12.

Pope John Paul II beatified Juan Diego in 1990. In 2002 the same pope canonized him at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Church celebrates the feast of St. Juan Diego on December 9.