

The Symbolism of the Image

The miraculous image produced on the apron or tilma of Blessed Juan Diego is rich in symbolism. The aureole or luminous light surrounding the Lady is reminiscent of the "woman clothed with the sun" of Rev. 12:1. The light is also a sign of the power of God who has sanctified and blessed the one who appears. The rays of the sun would also be recognized by the native people as a symbol of their highest god, Huitzilopochtli. Thus, the lady comes forth hiding but not extinguishing the power of the sun. She is now going to announce the God who is greater than their sun god.



The Lady is **standing upon the moon**. Again, the symbolism is that of the woman of Rev. 12:1 who has the "moon under her feet". The moon for the Meso-Americans was the god of the night. By standing on the moon, she shows that she is more powerful than the god of darkness. However, in Christian iconography the crescent moon under the Madonna's feet is usually a symbol of her perpetual virginity, and sometimes it can refer to her Immaculate Conception or Assumption.

The eyes of Our lady of Guadalupe are looking down with humility and compassion. This was a sign to the native people that she was not a god since in their iconography the gods stare straight ahead with their eyes wide open. We can only imagine how tenderly her eyes looked upon Blessed Juan Diego when she said: "Do not be troubled or weighed down with grief...Am I not here who am your Mother?"

The **angel** supporting the Lady testifies to her royalty. To the Meso-American Indians only kings, queens and other dignitaries would be carried on the shoulders of someone. The angel is transporting the Lady to the people as a sign that a new age has come.

The **mantle** of the Lady is blue-green or turquoise. To the native people, this was the color of the gods and of royalty. It was also the color of the natural forces of life and fecundity. In Christian art, blue is symbolic of eternity and immortality. In Judaism, it was the color of the robe of the high priest. The limbus or gold border of her mantle is another sign of nobility.

The **stars** on the Lady's mantle shows that she comes from heaven. She comes as the Queen of Heaven but with the eyes of a humble and loving mother. The stars also are a sign of the supernatural character of the image. The research of Fr. Mario Rojas Sánchez and Dr. Juan Homero Hernández Illescas of Mexico (published in 1983) shows that the stars on the Lady's mantle in the image are exactly as the stars of the winter solstice appeared before dawn on the morning of December 12, 1531.

The **color** of the Madonna's dress is rose or pale-red. Some have interpreted this as the color of dawn symbolizing the beginning of a new era. Others point to the red as a sign of martyrdom for the faith and divine love.

The **gold-encircled cross brooch** under the neck of the Lady's robe is a symbol of sanctity.

The girdle or **bow around her waist** is a sign of her virginity, but it also has several other meanings. The bow appears as a four-petaled flower. To the native Indians this was the *nahui ollin*, the flower of the sun, a symbol of plenitude. The cross-shaped flower was also connected with the cross-sticks which produce fire. For them, this was the symbol of fecundity and new life. The high position of

the bow and the slight swelling of the abdomen show that the Lady is "with child". According to Dr. Carlos Fernández Del Castillo, a leading Mexican obstetrician, the Lady appears almost ready to give birth with the infant head down resting vertically. This would further solidify her identification with the woman of Rev. 12 who is about to give birth.

Background of the Apparition

In the early morning hours of December 9, 1531, an Indian named Juan Diego was on his way to Mass. As he reached the top of a hill called Tepeyac he heard a beautiful music and a voice calling him: to,oman then appeared to him and asked him where he was going. She desired a temple to be built in the valley in her honor. She told Juan that she was ry Virgin Mother of the True God... to go to the palace of the bishop and tell him that she wanted a temple built there in the valley.

Juan went as Our Lady requested and after much waiting was able to see the bishop and tell him of the Virgin's wishes. The bishop did not believe Juan's story. Frustrated, Juan made his way back to the hill of Tepeyac and reported to Our Lady of his visit with the bishop. Our Lady encouraged him to return to the bishop again with her desire for the temple.

Upon Juan's second attempt to convince the bishop, the bishop told him to bring some sign that the woman he had seen was indeed the Blessed Mother. Juan returned to the hill to tell Our Lady of the bishop's response. Our Lady told Juan to return the following day for the sign for the bishop.

The next day, December 11, Juan had to care for his dying uncle, Juan Bernardino who asked Juan to get a priest so that he could go to confession and receive the last sacraments before his death. Very early the following day, Juan left to get a priest. He tried to avoid the hilltop of Tepeyac because he was ashamed at not having returned to the spot the previous day as Our Lady had requested. As he was taking a detour, Our Lady came down from the hilltop and asked him where he was going. She assured him to not worry about his uncle, and to return to the bishop with the sign he wanted. Our Lady instructed Juan to go to the top of the hill and gather roses. She then arranged them in his tilma and told him to take them to the bishop as the sign.

Juan went back to the bishop's palace. When Juan saw the bishop, he repeated the message of Our Lady and unfolded his tilma to show the bishop the sign. The roses tumbled out and there upon the tilma was the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary exactly as she appeared to him on the Tepeyac hillside. By Christmas that same year an adobe structure was built in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Our Lady of Guadalupe . Mother and Patroness of the Unborn 1999 Office of Respect Life – Diocese of Austin

Our Lady of Guadalupe

Feastday: December 12

Patron: of the Americas

Our Lady of Guadalupe December 12 (USA) When we reflect on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe we learn two important lessons, one of faith and one of understanding.

Missionaries who first came to Mexico with the conquistadors had little success in the beginning. After nearly a generation, only a few hundred Native Mexicans had converted to the Christian faith. Whether they simply did not understand what the missionaries had to offer or whether they resented these people who made them slaves, Christianity was not popular among the native people. Then in 1531 miracles began to happen. Jesus' own mother appeared to humble Juan Diego. The signs -- of the roses, of the uncle miraculously cured of a deadly illness, and especially of her beautiful image on Juan's mantle -- convinced the people there was something to be considered in Christianity. Within a short time, six million Native Mexicans had themselves baptized as Christians.

The first lesson is that God has chosen Mary to lead us to Jesus. No matter what critics may say of the devotion of Mexicans (and Mexican descendants) to Our Lady of Guadalupe, they owe their Christianity to her influence. If it were not for her, they would not know her son, and so they are eternally grateful. The second lesson we take from Mary herself. Mary appeared to Juan Diego not as a European madonna but as a beautiful Aztec princess speaking to him in his own Aztec language. If we want to help someone appreciate the gospel we bring, we must appreciate the culture and the mentality in which they live their lives. By understanding them, we can help them to understand and know Christ. Our Lady of Guadalupe is patron of the Americas.

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