

The Image that Converted Millions

In 1531, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to a simple Aztec Indian, Juan Diego. Since the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in 1492, the Spanish had conquered much of Mexico. They put a stop to the human sacrifices that were occurring there by many of the natives and they destroyed their pagan temples. There was much conflict between the Spanish and the natives of Central America. Most of the natives refused to convert to Catholicism, but Juan Diego was one of the few Aztecs who did. Mary appeared to him on a hill asking for a church to be built there. The bishop found Juan's amazing story hard to believe. So Mary supernaturally provided Juan Diego with roses from Spain. She arranged them in his cloak, which was called a tilma. When Juan opened his tilma, the roses dropped to the floor in front of the bishop and the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared on Juan Diego's tilma!



This simple image of a pregnant woman standing in front of the sun and on a crescent moon changed the course of Christian history forever. In a time when the Catholic Church was losing millions in Europe, Our Lady of Guadalupe was bringing in millions more from the former Aztec empire and beyond.

But why did this image mean so much to the natives as well as the Spanish? Why did it bring so many natives into the Catholic Church? The Aztec Indians had much symbolism in their culture and God used those beliefs to touch the hearts of the people. For example:

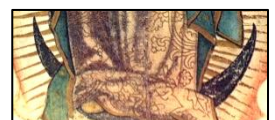
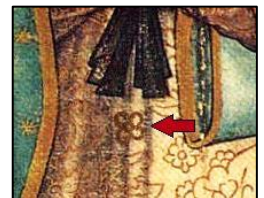
SUN

Mary is standing in front of the sun so this showed the Aztecs that she is mightier than their sun god.

On Mary's dress there is a flower that the Aztecs called the Nahui Ollin. It represented the sun. The Aztecs saw the sun as the giver of life. It is placed over the baby within her so it showed that she was carrying the true God who truly gives life.

MOON

Mary is standing on the moon. To the Aztecs, the moon was associated with the god, Tezcatlipoca. So this showed them that Mary was greater than him.



STARS

The stars shown on her mantle indicate that she comes from Heaven.

Also, scientists have shown that the 46 stars in the image are exactly as the stars appeared before dawn on the morning of December 12, 1531. (The day she appeared on the tilma.)

Fact: The image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was anticipated in Scripture:

Revelation 12:1 "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars"



CLOUDS

Mary is surrounded by clouds, showing that she is from Heaven.



FACE

Her face is bowed down and she is looking slightly to one side.

The Aztecs believe it was not proper to look directly at anyone's face.



HER EYES

Her eyes are looking downward. This shows humility and compassion unlike how their gods always looked: straight ahead with wide-open eyes. This shows that Mary is not a god.

It was only recently discovered in the last 50 years that when the image of the tilma is magnified over 2,000 times, there are human figures reflected in Mary's eyes: a total of thirteen people. The same people are found in both the left and right eyes but in different proportions. This is exactly what happens in human eyes; they reflect the objects before them. Basically, her eyes acted like a photograph of the moment Juan Diego opened his tilma!



In her eyes, you can see the following:

1. a bearded and mustached Indian (likely Saint Juan Diego)
2. a sitting Indian, who is looking up to the heavens;
3. the profile of a balding, elderly man with a white beard (Bishop Zumárraga)
4. a younger man (interpreter Juan González)
5. a woman of dark complexion (possibly a Negro slave)
6. a man with Spanish features stroking his beard with his hand.
7. in the center of the pupils, on a much more reduced magnification scale, there is another scene. It is an Indian family: a man, woman, and several children. In the right eye, other people can also be seen standing behind the woman.

ANGEL

Mary is supported by an angel. In Aztec culture, only a king, queen, or other royalty were carried on the shoulders of someone.

The angel has wings that are similar to an eagle's wings. The Aztecs believed that eagles delivered sacrifices to the gods. This meant that Mary and the child in her womb were offerings that please God.



The book of Revelation refers to this: "But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness" (Revelation 12:14).

HAIR

Her long unbraided hair meant that she was a virgin since married Aztec women braided their hair.



KNEE

Her knee was raised. This was done by Aztecs during prayer and praise (like song and dance).



HANDS

Her hands are together in prayer, as the Spanish did. In fact, her hands are different colors. One is darker than the other one. This represented the union of two races coming together. Her skin is a combination of Mexican and Spanish appearance (mestizo). She shows herself as a bridge between the 2 cultures.



Also, since she is praying, this means that she is not a god but praying to someone who is.

CLOTHING

Mary's rose-tinted, flowery tunic symbolizes the earth, while her turquoise, starry mantle represents the heavens. She is of both Heaven and Earth.

To the native people, her mantle was a color of the gods and of royalty. The gold border of her mantle is another sign of nobility.



FLOWERS

In addition to the Nahui Ollin flower mentioned above, there are eight other golden flowers on Mary's dress. The flowers are upside down and look like hearts with arteries. Hearts were part of the Aztec sacrifices.



BROOCH

The gold brooch under her neck represents holiness and sanctity. It is also engraved with a cross. To the Aztecs, a medallion symbolized consecration and in this case to Jesus.



BOW ON WAIST

Aztec noble women tied a black ribbon just above their waist to show they were pregnant. In fact, the high placement of the bow and the apparent swelling of her abdomen show that Mary is very pregnant. Equally, it appears that the infant is head down with a vertical body. Dec. 12, the day of the unveiling, is only two weeks from Christmas.



This would again connect her to Revelation 12: verse 2 "She was with child...she labored to give birth."

To the Aztecs, the trapezoid-shaped ends of the ribbon (the same shape as their pyramids) also represented the end of one cycle and the birth of a new era.

This image surely did begin a new era to the Spanish and the Aztec people, and it still continues to show us miracles today!

TILMA'S MATERIAL

Juan Deigo's tilma is a cactus-fiber mantle. It was a rough fabric that normally would not last very long (normally 10 years at the most) yet it's about 500 years old! Also, the area on the tilma where the image is feels like silk but the other parts are coarse!

IMAGE COLORING

There are no brush strokes on the image. It's as if the image was produced all at once. Whatever created the color of the image is not made from animal, plant, or mineral elements.

DURABILITY AND STRENGTH

The tilma was exposed to humidity, infrared and ultraviolet lights for 116 years without any protection. In 1785, a worker spilled nitric acid on the image but the image and tilma were not damaged. In 1921, a bomb containing 29 sticks of dynamite detonated underneath the image. The bomb shattered the marble altar rail and windows; a brass crucifix was twisted out of shape, but the tilma and glass case were unharmed.



Through this amazing image, which was given to us by the hand of Heaven, we can see the knowledge, artistry, and love of God. Its perfection had all of the right symbolism to convert the hearts of the Aztecs as well as millions of people throughout the years! Even now, it still proves what Our Lady of Guadalupe told St Juan Diego: "I am the ever Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God."

Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!

