



# SAINT JUAN DIEGO AND OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin (meaning “Eagle Who Speaks”), was born in 1474, just outside of what is now Mexico City. He was baptized at the age of 50 by one of the first Franciscan missionaries in the area. On December 9th, 10th, and 12th, 1531, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him on Tepeyac Hill, as he was on his way to Mass. She spoke to him in his own language, Nahuatl, and asked that a shrine be built for her there.

The local bishop didn't believe Juan when he told him what he had seen, so Juan returned to the hill in the following days. The Blessed Mother told him to climb up Tepeyac Hill, where he found roses flowering. At her instruction, he gathered them up and took them to the bishop. When the flowers fell out of the tilma, or cloak, he was carrying them in, an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared on the tilma as an Indigenous Mestizo woman. The image shows her in the traditional dress of the area, including with a black sash around her waist. This sash is an Aztec maternity belt that Mexican women would wear to indicate they were with child.

As she had requested, a shrine was built on the hill and named after an area of Spain known for a beautiful statue of Our Lady (Guadalupe). Juan lived as a hermit at the shrine for the rest of his life. Pilgrims had already begun to visit the site before his death in 1548, and there were millions of conversions to the Catholic Faith between 1531-1541. On July 31st, 2002, Juan Diego was canonized by Saint John Paul II, not only because of what he saw but also because of his witness as an Indigenous Christian.

The shrine, which has been built and rebuilt over the centuries, now receives millions of pilgrims every year. The image of the Blessed Mother has remained on the tilma for over five hundred years, and the date that it appeared, December 12, is kept as the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. She is patroness of the Americas, and is particularly important to Indigenous Catholics around the world.

It is on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe that the Church in Canada celebrates the National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. This initiative, coordinated since 2005 by the Canadian Catholic Indigenous Council (a CCCB Advisory group), marks this feast as a day of prayer, solidarity and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.



**The image that appeared on  
Saint Juan Diego's tilma on  
December 12, 1531.**