

Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

**December 12,
2004**

Luke 1: 39-56

Am I Not Here, Your Mother?

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In today's Gospel we witness Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth. The Gospel says that Mary went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. The account continues, "When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb for joy. My brothers and sisters, the greeting of Mary, who is full of grace, full of the Holy Spirit, was reaching her cousin Elizabeth and was bringing to the fragile and old cousin joy, hope, faith and love. Mary was bringing Elizabeth and her household the fruit of her womb, Jesus. Mary was bringing to her and her family the Lord and Savior, the One in whom she and all of us rejoice because our God does great things for Mary and for us and God's mercy endures for ever.

Such a merciful and loving God made possible Mary's visit to another hill country. This time it happened on December of 1531 in the little hill of Tepeyac, Mexico. A poor, middle-aged Indian Christian named Juan Diego was on his way to church when he was distracted from his way by the sound of beautiful music. As he tried to investigate the source of the music, he encountered the greeting of a beautiful woman who called him by name.

The woman identified herself as the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God. She was dressed in Indian garb covered with Aztec symbols and was wearing the Aztec sash of a pregnant woman. Once again she was bringing to the new world the fruit of her womb, the Savior, the God of mercies to the people who were in distress and oppression. She was bringing hope and the Light of the world to the people who were in darkness.

She spoke Nahuatl, Juan Diego's own tongue, and her features were those of the indigenous people. The Lady was wearing a blue mantle full of gold stars. The blue mantel represents royalty and the gold stars the prophecies of a dying civilization that would soon have a new birth. Her red robe symbolized the blood of the indigenous people, shed abundantly during the European conquest. She was wearing a Christian cross on her brooch and an Aztec cross centered on her womb. Her splendor was greater than that of the sun which framed her because the fruit of her womb, Jesus, is more powerful than the sun, the Aztec deity.

La Morenita, (the little Dark One as all the Latino/Hispanic call her) promises to alleviate the sufferings of the people, and she commissions Juan Diego to carry a message to the Archbishop Juan de Zumarraga. She wants a temple built on the Tepeyac hill because there she wants to give her love and compassion to all the inhabitants of this new land. She assured Juan Diego of her maternal protection and said to him: "You need not be afraid. Am I not here, your mother?"

Juan Diego found out that his uncle Bernardino was dying. He tried to avoid the Lady on his way to find a priest, to prepare his uncle for death, but the Lady intervened and miraculously healed the uncle.

The Indian delivered her message, but the skeptical bishop insisted on a sign that would authenticate the Indian's strange story. Juan Diego, taking rejection as proof of his own unworthiness begs the Lady to replace him by a more important personage, but Mary insisted that he is her chosen messenger. To comply with the Archbishop's demand for a sign, Mary invites Juan Diego to gather roses blooming inexplicably in December at Tepeyac hill. Juan Diego filled his coarse cloak, called *tilma*, with the roses. He presented the roses to the Lady and she arranged the roses in the *tilma* and tied the end of Juan Diego's cloak around his neck. Then she said to him, "This is the sign that you are to take to the bishop," warning him not to unfold the *tilma* until he reached the bishop's presence. When he showed the roses to the archbishop, there was seen, marvelously painted on the cloak, the picture of our Lady as she had appeared on the hill of Tepeyac.

In 1754 Pope Benedict XIV made December 12 the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and in 1910 Pope Pius X declared her the patroness of Latin America. Pope John Paul II in 1997 at the Synod for America described her as the "Star of the first and new evangelization of the America."

Today, the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe reminds us to reflect on how, as a faith community, we must commit ourselves to remove all barriers to equality because all people deserve to be listened to and respected.

Juan Diego also represents all of us struggling to know the way to God. Each day that we wake up we are invited to participate in bringing forth new life, by adding joy to the day, by supporting family and friends who need it, by being present to those who are lonely, by greeting them like Mary did to Elizabeth with love and care. We are invited daily to give life, to give birth and make our small part of the world a bit more pleasant, more aware of God's love, more reflective of the goodness that is inside of us.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe who is the mother of the unborn, the orphans, the rejected, the voiceless, the immigrants, the marginalized and oppressed deliver us from becoming oppressive, cynical, opportunists, blind to justice, arrogant and elitists. May she, who is the first disciple of Christ, a reflection of God's love and compassion,

model of evangelization and humility, help us to conceive Jesus too in our hearts by faith. May we, like Mary, become bearers of Christ in this Eucharist for our Church and our world today.

Alone we can not do it, but Mary is the witness that assures us that we need to trust God, because ~~Nothing~~ will be impossible with God.®