

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Third Sunday of Advent: December 15, 2024

*“Guadalupe”*

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the Third Sunday of Advent. This is the “pink” Sunday of Advent - the one that celebrates Joy. I don’t understand the lectionary because this Sunday is supposed to represent Mary, yet our Gospel presents John the Baptist. Since we are between the celebration of Guadalupe and when Mary will recite the Magnificat next Sunday, I thought we would venture to the feminine side.

The Virgin of Guadalupe, like the shroud of Turin, appears on a piece of fabric. Both are sacred objects, hundreds of years old, and both depict an image said to be miraculous. The Virgin of Guadalupe was declared Queen of Mexico and is the Patron of the Americas. We have her image here alongside our children’s library. Over 20 million people visit the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe each year, now situated on the very same hill on which she appeared.

In 1990, Pope Saint John Paul II visited Mexico and beatified Juan Diego the witness to the Virgin and 10 years later, in the year 2000, Juan Diego was declared a Saint. This past Thursday was the celebration of the Lady of Guadalupe. She is a version and vision of the caring mother, Mary. History has it that sightings of Mary occur when there is great worldly or moral strife. I will now share the story of Guadalupe with you. If you know it, please enjoy; if it is new, I’m glad you’re here.

On Saturday morning, December 9, 1531, Juan Diego was on his way to church to participate in the Mass for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and in the catechetical instruction which would follow. Our Blessed Mother appeared to Saint Juan Diego, an older native American who had recently lost his dear wife. As he reached Tepeyac Hill, he heard beautiful music and a beautiful voice calling out his name.

The Blessed Mother appeared to him as the “woman clothed with the sun” of the Book of Revelation, pregnant with the Child Jesus. She instructed Juan Diego to go to the house of Bishop Juan de Zumárraga and to request that a chapel be built in her honor on Tepeyac Hill so that she might show the infinite majesty and mercy of God to all His children of America.

Juan Diego went to the bishop’s house at which he was received with great respect, but also with hesitation regarding his story of the apparition and of our Blessed Mother’s request. The bishop, who was praying and working to bring together the native Americans and the Spanish conquerors and settlers, requested time to consider the matter. On Juan Diego’s return home, the Blessed Mother appeared to him for the second time.

Disappointed that he had failed in his mission, he asked Our Lady of Guadalupe to send a more esteemed messenger to the bishop, so that he would believe the message. Our Blessed Mother instructed Juan Diego to return to the bishop with her request.

The third apparition took place on December 10. Juan Diego had gone to the bishop for a second time. The bishop responded by asking for a sign so that he might believe the Blessed Mother’s request. On his way home, Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, and he told her of the bishop’s

request for a sign. Our Lady promised to provide the sign for the bishop when Juan Diego would return to her on the next day.

Juan Diego missed his appointment with Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 11 because he was looking after his uncle Juan Bernardino who was gravely ill. On December 12, he was hurrying to bring a priest to administer the sacraments to his uncle who was dying. He took a different route in order to avoid another encounter with the Blessed Mother, embarrassed that he had missed the appointment on December 11 and not wanting to be delayed in seeking spiritual help for his uncle.

Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to him nonetheless, the fourth time, assuring him that his uncle was already cured and instructing him to gather flowers on the top of the hill as a sign to take to the bishop. Juan Diego trusted Our Lady and found on the top of the frozen and barren hill the most beautiful flowers.

He gathered them and Our Blessed Mother arranged them in his cloak, or "tilma" as it was called. Juan Diego then hurried to the bishop's house where this fourth apparition reached its fullness. When Juan Diego presented the tilma of exotic flowers to Zumárraga, the flowers fell out and he recognized them as Castilian roses, which are not found in Mexico.

When he opened his tilma to show the flowers to the Bishop, Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared depicted on the tilma. The bishop immediately understood the truth of Juan Diego's message from the Blessed Mother and hastened to have the chapel built on Tepeyac Hill.

The fifth apparition took place in the little home in which Juan Diego was living with his uncle. Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Bernardino and cured him of his fatal illness. Juan Diego himself died in 1548, seventeen years after the apparitions, at the age of 74.

This actual tilma, preserved since that date and showing the familiar image of the Virgin Mary with her head bowed and hands together in prayer, represents the Virgin of Guadalupe. It remains perhaps the most sacred object in all of Mexico.

The story is best known from a manuscript written in the Aztec's native language Nahuatl by the scholar Antonio Valeriano. It was written sometime after 1556.

There have been many other sightings of Mary throughout history and she seems to appear when the world is in the midst of strife. She brings with her a hope and joy that seem to allow the world to push on forward. For the Spanish and Mexican lives during Juan's time, Guadalupe brought hope that the two cultures could find a religious harmony.

Let us find our inner joy as we celebrate not only Mary, but the feminine side of God. **Amen.**