



**Our Lady of Guadalupe**  
edited by Mirabai Starr

**Hardcover**

**4 1/2" x 6 1/4"**

**124 Pages**

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*Praise to you, Our Lady of Guadalupe, who appeared to a humble corn farmer in the high desert of ancient Mexico and healed the heart of a ravaged nation with your compassionate glance.*

*Please extend your cloak of mercy to enfold us all, the weary and disheartened, the poor and downtrodden, those who work for peace and justice in the world, and the ones who struggle for righteousness in our own lives.*

*Amen.*

--Mirabai Starr

## Devotion, Prayers, and Living Wisdom

### Our Lady of Guadalupe

#### Woman Clothed with the Sun

She appeared on a remote hilltop in the high desert of Latin America during the height of the Conquest. The indigenous people saw her as a manifestation of Goddess. The Catholic occupiers recognized her as the Virgin Mary. Her compassionate gaze melted the barriers between cultures and faiths, spreading a wave of healing love through a war-ravaged region. She did not come to pay her respects to the privileged and the powerful. She called on the poor and oppressed. She lifted them to their feet, and infused them with dignity and hope.

The Spanish called him Juan Diego; we no longer remember his Nahuatl name. They called *her* Our Lady of Guadalupe. Yet, when the Divine Mother revealed herself to the Aztec peasant we know as Juan Diego, the name she gave herself was in his native tongue. History generally adjusts the reality of the conquered people to match the vision of the conquerors.

The year was 1531. Juan Diego was climbing Tepeyac Hill “on his way to attend to divine things.” The European version of this encounter paints a picture of Juan Diego as a humble Indian recently converted to Christianity, who was making a pilgrimage to a chapel in Mexico City (the ancient empire of Tenochtitlan) to hear a sermon. Suddenly, the Virgin Mary appeared to him in what turned out to be the exact location of an indigenous shrine to the Goddess Tonantzin, One of the first known accounts of this miracle is called *Nican Mopohua*.

While this historical document clearly conveys the teachings of the Catholic Church, it is written in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec people of pre-Conquest Mexico. The poetic narrative tells the story of the four apparitions of the Blessed Mother to the peasant Juan Diego.

According to the cherished legend, as he neared the crest of Tepeyac Hill, Juan Diego suddenly heard the most exquisite music flowing down from the summit. It sounded as if every species of bird were singing together in glorious harmony. A sublime radiance appeared in the sky. Juan Diego stood basking in the light and listened until the song ended. He wondered if he was in Xochitalpan, the ancestral place of perfect bliss to which his people believed they were destined to go when they were released at last from their mortal bodies.

Juan Diego was gazing upward toward the source of the celestial music when he heard a woman calling his name from the top of the hill. Suddenly, she materialized in a ball of light. She was the most beautiful girl Juan Diego had ever seen: both vibrant and poised. It looked as if she were “clothed with the sun.” He immediately prostrated himself at her feet. She asked him where he was going and he told her he was headed for her “home.”

“My dear little son, I love you,” she said. “And I want you to know who I am.” She then identified herself as “the ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God who gives life and maintains its existence.” This God, she reminded the trembling prophet, created all things and lives in all places. “He is the Lord of Heaven and Earth,” she said.



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*Only with You*

*If the moon at your feet yields  
space and forges the pedestal  
of your beauty,*

*if breaking through the clouds  
as if by surprise, the sun  
shines with the rays of your  
life,*

*if you have come, Maiden,  
your head covered with a  
mantle of stars,*

*if the radiance of your eyes  
only expresses that the light of  
love is already kindled,*

*if you are, Virgin, the flame that  
God the Father left to light our  
way,*

*if you are "the river of light," my  
sweet Mother, that only clarity  
has sown,*

*I come so that you might  
illumine my destiny, because  
there is nothing like you  
anywhere else.*

— Monsignor P. Guizar V.

Then the Lady told Juan Diego that she had chosen him to be her spokesperson. Like all prophets, he tried to talk her out of it. The Virgin Maria de Guadalupe expressed her desire that a church be built on this holy hill, a sanctuary where anyone who struggles would be able to experience her compassion.

"All those who sincerely ask my help in their work and in their sorrows will know my Mother's Heart in this place," she said. When she told him to run to the city and tell the bishop what he had seen and heard, Juan Diego complied, but with serious doubts that this high official would receive him. He was right. The bishop's servants, suspicious of this illiterate peasant, kept him waiting for hours. When at last Juan Diego was given his minute with the prelate, his worst fears were confirmed: he was brusquely patronized and summarily dismissed.

Bishop-elect Fray Juan de Zumarraga condescended to consider the request of the mysterious apparition and told the Indian he could come visit him again sometime. Juan Diego left the bishop's palace feeling completely unworthy of the Mother's mission. Defeated, Juan Diego returned to the place where she had first appeared to him and found her waiting for him there.

As soon as he saw her, Juan's sorrow and doubt melted. The turmoil in his mind was replaced by a preternatural sense of well-being. Still, he implored her to send someone else. Someone more verbal. Someone less Indian. Guadalupe informed him that there were many other people she could have chosen, but that she had elected him. She praised the goodness of his heart and insisted that he was worthy of the task she had set before him. And she sent him back to Bishop Zumarraga.

Once again, Juan waited for hours until the bishop finally called him into his presence. Juan repeated the Mother's request. This time, Zumarraga told him to ask the Lady for a sign as proof of her divine identity. Juan returned to the hill to find Guadalupe waiting for him again. Embarrassed, he relayed the bishop's demand that she prove who she was. "My little son, am I not your Mother?" she said. "Do not fear. The bishop shall have his sign. Come back to this place tomorrow." And then she blessed him. "Only peace, my little son," Mother Mary said to Juan Diego. But Juan Diego did not return to the hill the next day. During the night, his uncle, Juan Bernardino, became terminally ill. Juan did not feel he could leave his uncle's side.

He remained tending the dying man. As it became clear that Juan Bernardino was not going to recover, Juan Diego finally set out to find a priest to administer the last rites. There was no way to get to the village where the priest lived without passing near Tepeyac Hill. Ashamed at his inability to comply with the Lady's request, Juan Diego tried to avoid the spot where she had appeared to him in the past. But she materialized in the middle of his detour.

"Do not be distressed, my littlest son. Am I not here with you? Am I not your Mother? Are you not under my shadow of protection?" When Juan offered the excuse of his uncle's impending death, Guadalupe promised him that his uncle was not going to die at this time. "There is no need to engage a priest," she said, "for his health is at this moment restored."

Then she ordered Juan Diego to climb to the top of the hill and cut the flowers he would find growing there. It was December, and very cold. Even in the height of summer, nothing but cactus and thorns had ever grown in the high desert zone of Tepeyac Hill. But Juan Diego did not hesitate. He ran up the slope and discovered hundreds of flowers of every shape and color blooming in wild profusion in the



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*Mary, Virgin of Guadalupe*

*Dark lady, you smile at me  
across the mountains the  
secret smile of ancient  
people.*

*What thoughts do you  
send me, dark beautiful  
lady? Will you someday  
tell me when I come with  
great armfuls of roses over  
the mysterious mountains  
to your feet?*

*Dear, dark queen, will you  
give me too lovely roses in  
December?*

— Anne B. Quinn

place to which the Lady had guided him. He cut the blossoms and tucked them into his *tilma*, a traditional poncho made of *ayate* cactus fiber. He carried them back to Guadalupe, who arranged them with loving care and then sent Juan Diego back to the bishop.

This time, Zumarraga received him without delay. When Juan Diego opened his cloak to reveal the wildflowers, a cascade of Castilian roses came tumbling out. But it was not the Spanish roses that astounded the bishop and his entourage. Imprinted on the inside of Juan Diego's *tilma* was a perfect image of Mother Mary, exactly as Juan Diego had described her. All doubt vanished and the men fell to their knees in supplication.

The next day, after escorting the bishop to the spot of the apparition, Juan Diego returned home to check on his uncle. Juan Bernardino, as the Lady had promised, was completely cured. Juan Diego's uncle reported that a beautiful woman had appeared to him as he was lying on his deathbed. She was suffused with light. The Lady told Juan Bernardino that she had just sent his nephew to Tenochtitlan with a picture of herself. And then she told him her name: Coatlicollope, or, in the local Aztec dialect, "She Who Treads on Snakes."

When the Catholic leaders heard this account, they called her "Nuestra Señora Santa Maria de Guadalupe," importing the name from a much-loved statue of the Virgin Mary found in the village of Guadalupe in Extremadura, Spain, the homeland of many of the conquistadors. The Spanish "Guadalupe," itself a corruption of the original Arabic, meaning "River of Love, River of Light," sounded enough like "Coatlicollope" that the Spaniards were able to justify it. The Indians had no choice but to comply.

Bishop Zumarraga had the ancient shrine to Tonantzin destroyed and ordered a church to the Virgin of Guadalupe built on the same site. Juan Diego gave his hut to his uncle and moved into a special room adjacent to Our Lady's chapel, where he spent the rest of his life serving her with singular devotion.

Within six years of the apparition, six million Aztecs converted to Christianity. Where they had persistently resisted the alien male God of the Christian Church, they joyfully embraced a Divine Mother who responded to their despair with comfort and hope, who blessed the emergence of a new people, a people blended of indigenous and European, of earth and sky, a *meztizo* people, *la raza*.

This Mother continues to shower her blessings on the poor and the grieving throughout this ancient New World of the Americas. She unites the biblical "woman clothed with the sun" and the indigenous serpent goddess. She is Guadalupe-Tonantzin, and she is adored.

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