

What is the difference between the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Blessed Virgin Mother Mary? Are they the same person?

On December 12th, the Church celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1531, Our Blessed Mother Mary appeared to a poor Indian, Juan Diego, in Mexico just outside of what is now Mexico City. She spoke to him in his native language and took on the appearance of a Native American, and she was with child. She requested that Juan go the bishop and ask that a shrine be built on the site of her appearance. As proof of who was making the request, roses miraculously bloomed on the hillside even though it was already December. Mary arranged the roses in Juan's cape, called a tilma, and Juan took the tilma to the bishop. When the cloak was opened, an image of Mary miraculously appeared on its surface. The tilma with the image of Mary is still on display at the Basilica of Guadalupe even though the cloak was made of natural cactus fibers and should have degraded long ago.

Mary has appeared many times throughout the world with various messages, requests, and miracles. The most notable are her appearances at Fatima, Lourdes, and this one in Mexico as the Our Lady of Guadalupe. There is some disagreement about why Mary referred to herself by this last name. One explanation is that it is a phonetic pronunciation of the Aztec word *coatlxopeuh* which means "who crushes the serpent." Mary's appearance in Mexico led to the conversion of six million natives and helped to put an end to the human sacrifice occurring at the hands of the Aztecs. The people of Mexico hold a special devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, but Pope Pius XII referred to her as the Patroness of the Americas, not just Mexico. Pope John Paul II was the first pope to visit the Guadalupe shrine in 1979 and later referred to her as the Mother of America. The pro-life movement has adopted her as Patroness of the Unborn.

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