

# Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Divine Feminine, and Joseph Smith's First Vision

by Benjamin Knoll | Aug 1, 2017 | Featured, Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith | 0 comments



My family and I recently moved to Mexico on a one-year assignment for my job. My wife and I were both Spanish-speaking missionaries (she in Panama and I in the U.S.) and we are excited to immerse ourselves again in the culture and language (not to mention the food!).

A few weeks ago we visited a Catholic church in a small rural town of about 3,500 people on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Apart from a Presbyterian congregation, the Catholic parish is the only church in town and sits prominently in the middle of the community, with loud bells that ring out 30 minutes before mass every day.

My oldest daughter (eight years old) noticed the prominent position of the Virgin Mary in the decoration of the church interior. A large statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe occupies a central position behind the altar, with a crucifix with Jesus close by. I explained to her that Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe is perhaps the key identifying symbol of Mexican Catholicism and is also a prominent symbol of Mexican culture as a whole.

I later had the opportunity to talk to an Episcopal priest in the community where we are living. In our conversation about wider topics of religion, politics, and culture in Mexico, he said that

many Mexican Protestants condemn the focus on Guadalupe as idolatry. (I was taught similar things growing up in the Mormon tradition.) As a Protestant, he agreed to an extent, but also said that he believes it to be a manifestation of the yearning for the Divine Feminine in Mexican spirituality that is otherwise absent in a strongly patriarchal Catholic culture. Given that reality, he says he doesn't worry too much about the strong religious focus on Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe: if it helps the people connect with the feminine side of spirituality, all the better.

This led me to do more research on the tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexican spirituality and religion. It begins with the story of Mexican peasant Juan Diego who, in 1531, experiences a vision of the Virgin Mary who gives him a special mission. I won't recount the full story here (see [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), or [here](#) for details), but what struck me was a variety of parallels to the Joseph Smith First Vision account in Mormonism. Specifically:

### **Juan Diego and Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe**

Juan Diego is living in a time of religious confusion. Ten years earlier the Spanish had conquered the Aztec empire and were imposing the Christian faith on the people.

Juan Diego is a poor, uneducated indigenous peasant.

One morning Juan Diego is walking to a Catholic church for a religious lesson as he learns more about the Catholic faith.

Juan Diego hears beautiful music and sees a bright light on Tepeyac Hill, a sacred Aztec location.

Juan Diego sees the Virgin Mary hovering in the air, surrounded by bright light.

The Virgin Mary calls Juan Diego by name, in his native language of Nahuatl.

The Virgin Mary identifies herself as the mother of Jesus: "the mother of the very true deity."

The Virgin Mary gives Juan Diego a mission

### **Joseph Smith and the First Vision**

Joseph Smith is living through a time of religious confusion: the Second Great Awakening.

Joseph Smith is a poor, uneducated backwoods farmer.

Joseph Smith is investigating a variety of different Christian denominations and concerned about his standing with God.

Joseph Smith sees "a pillar of light ... above the brightness of the sun" in "The Sacred Grove."

Joseph Smith sees Jesus (or Jesus and the Father, depending on the account) in the air above him, "whose brightness and glory defy all description."

The Father calls Joseph Smith by name, in his native language of English.

The Father identifies himself as the father of the Jesus: "This is my beloved Son."

Jesus gives Joseph Smith a vision to restore

to build a temple on the site through which she could bless and help the people.

Juan Diego goes to tell the Catholic Bishop Zumarraga about the vision and his mission. The Bishop does not believe him.

The Virgin gives Juan Diego a sign: she tells him to gather flowers on the hill and show them to the Bishop. The flowers are growing on a barren spot in December and are not native to Mexico. He gathers them in his tunic and brings them to the Bishop. He releases them on the floor and on the tunic miraculously now appears the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

To this day, the tunic with the miraculous image of Guadalupe can be viewed at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, inviting visitors to believe.

Scholars later identify several different and somewhat conflicting accounts of this narrative.

the Church through which he can bless and help the people.

Joseph Smith recounts his story to various religious leaders of the day. They do not believe him.

Jesus, through the Angel Moroni, gives Joseph Smith a sign: retrieve a set of records from the hill Cumorah and translate them into English. Despite possessing no knowledge of ancient languages, Joseph translates the book miraculously and it becomes The Book of Mormon, "another testament of Jesus Christ."

To this day, the miraculously-translated Book of Mormon can be read in over one hundred languages, inviting readers to believe.

Scholars later identify several different and somewhat conflicting accounts of this narrative.

One key difference, however, is that Bishop Zumarraga believes the sign and plans begin to build a shrine to the Virgin Mary on that spot (now the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City). Contemporary religious leaders in Joseph Smith's day, however, continued in their disbelief.

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

- What do you make of the idea that the Virgin of Guadalupe is a manifestation of the yearning for the Divine Feminine in an otherwise patriarchal religious culture? Are there similar or parallel manifestations in Mormonism? How do they compare/contrast with the place of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexican Catholicism?
- What do you make of the parallels between the narrative of Juan Diego and the narrative of Joseph Smith? What might explain the parallels? (Also, am I stretching too far in drawing the several parallels identified above? Why or why not?)
- What implications do these parallels have for our understanding of the relationship between religion and culture?
- What implications do these parallels have for our understanding of the nature of religious experience across world cultures?

- Is there a place for Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mormon theology? Can the story of Juan Diego be literally true if Mormon's founding narrative is literally true, or vice versa? Or are they mutually exclusive?
- What other interesting questions emerge from the comparison of Juan Diego and Joseph Smith?

Discuss.

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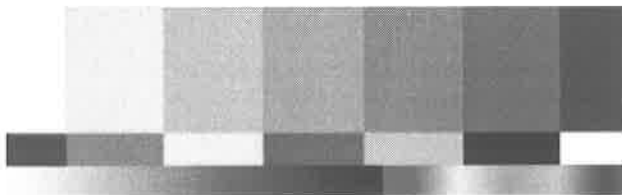
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