

ST. LOUIS DE MONTFORT CHURCH - SANTA MARIA

Two excerpts from the December issue of the newsletter "The Messenger"

Our Lady of Guadalupe - by Fr. John Mayhew, C.J.

When the Spanish forces under Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico in 1519, the Aztec empire was at the height of its power, being ruled from Tenochtitlán (Mexico City).

One of the Aztec goddesses was Tonantzin, the mother goddess. Her temple was built on Tepeyac, a hill six miles from the center of the capital. An extant statue shows her head and garments covered with coiling snakes; her face reflects grief. She demanded human sacrifices to keep her alive. Cortés demolished the temple.



In 1528 Juan Zumárraga, from Spain, was appointed the first bishop of the New World. He began to evangelize, started up social welfare projects and founded the College of Santa Cruz. Yet three years later the indigenous people were still attached to Tonantzin and there were very few baptisms. All his work and the work of the priests before him had been fruitless and disappointing. Furthermore, the governor, Don Nune de Guzmán, and his men, were exploiting the Indians: torture, murder, rape and pillaging went on unchecked, according to the bishop's report to Spain. There would be bloody uprising, he wrote.

On 9th of December 1531, Juan Diego, an Indian who had been baptized in 1525, saw the first of a series of apparitions from the "Queen of Heaven". She asked that he go to the bishop and ask him to build a "house of God" on Tepeyac, the site of the former temple of Tonantzin, the fearsome mother goddess. At the last apparition she left imprinted on Juan Diego's coarse poncho (tilma) the beautiful image of herself. This would be the clear sign that the bishop would need. (The tilma is preserved in the huge basilica dedicated to her in Mexico City and is venerated by millions every year.) The bishop built the chapel, framed the tilma and put Juan Diego in charge of it.

Thousands of the indigenous people began coming to see the imprint. They had never seen a more beautiful representation. Juan Diego's new charge was now to explain to the huge stream of Indians who arrived from all over the country that this is what the real Mother of God looked like. She did not have a heart twisting and writhing in grief like the snakes that clothed the body of Tonantzin who demanded human sacrifice. Rather she is like an Indian mother-to-be, "clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, with a crown of stars on her head". (see Rv 12, 1f)

As a result of these apparitions and the image of the Queen of Heaven, there occurred the greatest mass conversions in Christianity in its 2,000 years. In 10 years, eight million were baptized.

A priest wrote home to Spain: "Had I not witnessed it with my own eyes, I should not venture to report it. I have to affirm that at the convent of Quecholac, another priest and myself baptized 14,200 souls in five days. We even imposed the oil of catechumens and the oil of chrism on all of them – an undertaking of no little labor."

Our Lady of Guadalupe is the Patroness of the Americas and her feast day is December 12th. We pray to her for conversion of our families.

Navidad Latina - by Mayra Morales Farias

This year on Friday, December 18th, the Grupo Hispano is producing a *pastorela* (pas'toral in English, with the stress on the first syllable). Pastorelas are from a long tradition of drama, poetry and prose that go back to the Latin poet Virgil (d. 19 BC). These productions are about country life, its joys, its pleasures, its simplicity. In Mexico, pastorelas are cast with village characters, shepherds, angels and the devil and the plot develops around the birth of Jesus in the stable in Bethlehem. They are performed from Advent to the Feast of the Presentation (February 2nd) outside in the village square, or on someone's property.

This year's pastorela comes from La Higuera, a village in Michoacán. As in all of them, this year's pastorela has lots of humor, practical wisdom and expressions of simple village faith, as well as dances, ancient songs, the use of colorful regional costumes and a few masks. In Mexico, these productions can last about four hours, but ours will last about an hour and a half.

On Saturday, December 19th, after the Spanish Mass, we are celebrating *Las Posadas* in the parish hall. The word *Las Posadas* means "the inns" and it is celebrated in different forms throughout Mexico during Advent and Christmas time. Two young people, dressed as Mary and Joseph, go from house to house asking for lodging, hoping that they will be welcomed so that Mary can have her child.



Another example of this tradition occurs at Christmas parties of large families. The couple dressed as Mary and Joseph, together with a group of family members, walks around the home. They stop at a door, knock and begin to sing an ancient carol asking for lodging. Replying from inside, the rest of the family sing a second carol informing Mary and Joseph that there is no room for them. After several tries at other doors, or at other houses in the neighborhood, the carolers from inside (it has all been planned in advance) sing a third carol telling Mary and Joseph that they are welcome at the inn. Then as they enter, all strike up a fourth carol. Every one is served hot chocolate or rice water with cinnamon, or hot fruit drinks, special bread, tamales and all the seasonal dishes which Mamá and Abuelita have prepared.



Christmastime is a time for being together with family. Perhaps Christmas Eve is the high point of the family celebration, but on the spiritual side there is *Misa del Gallo* (Midnight Mass or Mass of Cock Crow), or the Spanish Mass on Christmas Day (6:45 p.m. at St Louis de Montfort). After this there is the custom of *el arrullamiento* from the word *arrullar*, meaning to "sing a child to sleep". Families bring their statues of the Christ child and sing a lullaby remembering Mary, the Virgin Mother, rocking her new-born son to sleep.