

Saint Juan Diego

And Our Lady of Guadalupe

by Josephine Nobisso



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BACK FROM THE DEAD

No one knew that when they buried Princess Papantzin she was still alive. Suddenly, the quiet of the lush palace gardens was shattered by her screams from within the damp tomb. Hummingbirds scattered, and spotted leopards yowled in fear. Members of the royal household, who had been mourning her death, came running. "Unseal the tomb!" they cried, their faces ashen with terror.

Princess Papantzin stumbled out, skin tingling from the effects of the strange dream she had had while in her coma. "Alert my brother!" she ordered.

Emperor Montezuma II listened wide-eyed as his sister described her experience. "My vision was a prophecy meant for you!" she exclaimed. "In my dream I met a man all made of light. He wore a kind of symbol on his forehead—two intersecting black lines. I followed him to the edge of the great sea.

We stared into the mists over the water. Suddenly, the fog parted and I gasped at vast canoes that loomed over me, bounding toward the shore.

"The vessels were carrying men from a faraway land—men who are our people's long-awaited messengers from the god, *Quetzalcoatl* (KETS-ahl-KO-waht). They are the prophesied foreigners who will conquer you, Montezuma. They will finally bring knowledge of the true God to our people, the Aztecs."

"I have expected this," the emperor murmured. "How shall I know when all you saw is about to be fulfilled?"

"The billowing white sails of the vessels also bore the symbol of the intersecting lines," Princess Papantzin told her brother. "It was as if that symbol itself were the force that drew the great canoes to Mexico's shores."

"The symbol?" Emperor Montezuma asked. The Mexican tribes already honored a symbol made of two intersecting lines. The vertical line stood for things that descended from the supernatural world, and the horizontal line stood for earthly things.

At the point where the two lines touched—the center of this “cross”—the Aztecs believed that the worlds of heaven and earth met. “So,” the emperor reasoned, “it is to be by this sign that our empire will fall and the Aztecs will be given a new life!”

GOD'S GREAT PLAN

Princess Papantzin, who had fallen into a coma, was accidentally buried alive in 1505. That was thirteen years after Christopher Columbus had landed in another part of the New World. At that time, the Aztecs of ancient Mexico were still waiting to learn whether any of the many gods they worshipped was the *true* one. "Perhaps," their priests told each other, "he will be a god we have failed to acknowledge!"

Another prophecy, based on the Aztec calendar, foretold: "The hour for gaining knowledge of the one true God will come soon. It will be a time that is both happy and sad, for that hour will also mark the end of our great Aztec culture." Although tremendous changes and upheavals were expected, Emperor Montezuma and the Aztecs looked forward to them. "If a nation becomes friends with the one true God," they told each other, "it can petition him for all its needs. It will then have security, and its people can live in peace."

Along with their many shrines dedicated to the gods of nature, the Aztecs had erected a great shrine reserved for the true God whom they did not yet know. They called him "the God through whom everything lives." But on the pedestal of that vacant temple, no figure or graven image had ever been placed. "No one knows whom to honor there," the Aztecs said when they passed it.

Princess Papantzin's dream encouraged her brother Montezuma. He had to wait another fourteen years, however, before the prophesied strangers appeared. In 1519, when the thirty-four-year-old Spanish explorer Hernando Cortes landed in what is now Mexico with his band of about 650 Spaniards and a handful of Indians, a rumor reached Montezuma: the Europeans' helmets were decorated with a cross!

"Bring me one of these helmets!" Montezuma commanded. Sure enough, there on its front, was a cross—the very sign his sister had seen in her dream.



God was preparing the moment that would shape the history not only of the

“new” land, called the “Americas,” but also of the “old” world in Europe.

“The Church is suffering,” Catholic Europeans said. “Because of some scandals and the heresies being spread among the people, millions have lost the faith. Now some are thinking that they can reform the Church on their own.”

Other Catholics reminded each other, “We need to remember that no matter what happens, it is Jesus, God himself, who always leads and cares for his Church. Jesus never abandons us!”

Another issue dividing Christians in Europe at this time was the use of holy objects. Down through the centuries many people had found that focusing their attention on a holy object helped them to pray. For example, the Israelites had the Ark of the Covenant and the scroll of God’s Law. Catholics later used holy pictures or statues to remind them of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin and the saints as they prayed. But some European Christians were now insisting that holy objects no longer be used. This only added to the growing disagreement between different groups of people.

God was about to restore the faith of his people in Europe, the Old World, by a

miracle that would take place for his people in the New World. He would reveal his covenant to this other portion of his people, the native peoples of the New World, who had not yet heard the Gospel. Just as he had used Mary's help to bring Jesus into the world, God would now use her to bring Jesus to many who had never heard of him. In a short while, God would send the Mother of his Son to Mexico....

Perhaps God even gave a hint of the wonderful miracle yet to come. During the Age of Exploration, ships destined to carry the sons and daughters of Europe on dangerous journeys were crafted with extreme care. Great thought was also given to the selection of their names. Most ships were placed under the patronage of favorite saints. The crew would ask the patron saint of the ship to intercede with God for a safe voyage.

Leaving Europe to sail into the unknown, Christopher Columbus (whose first name means "Christ-bearer") was given three ships for his voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. All three were christened in honor of the Blessed Mother: *La Niña*, *La Pinta* and *La Santa Maria*. *La Santa Maria* was Columbus's main or flag ship.

Columbus reached land in 1492. This was only thirty-nine years before Mary appeared to a native man named Juan Diego in Mexico. Columbus went ashore with what appeared to be a promise and a prophecy that God would “paint” the image of his young Mother for his people. Read together as *La Pinta Niña Santa Maria*, the names of Columbus’s three ships translate to: *The painted girl, Holy Mary*.