

“Fresh Flowers in Winter”
The Story of Saint Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe



500 years ago in Mexico, there lived a humble Indian man named “Cuauhtlatoatzin,” which means “eagle that speaks.”
No one imagined he would one day become a saint!

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At that time the Aztecs ruled Mexico. They were a very religious people, but served cruel, false gods. The Indians lived in constant fear of these evil gods. No one in Mexico knew about Jesus Christ.

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In 1519, Spanish soldiers came to Mexico. They defeated the Aztecs. The Spanish brought Catholic priests to teach everybody in Mexico about the True God and that Jesus Christ came to save everyone.

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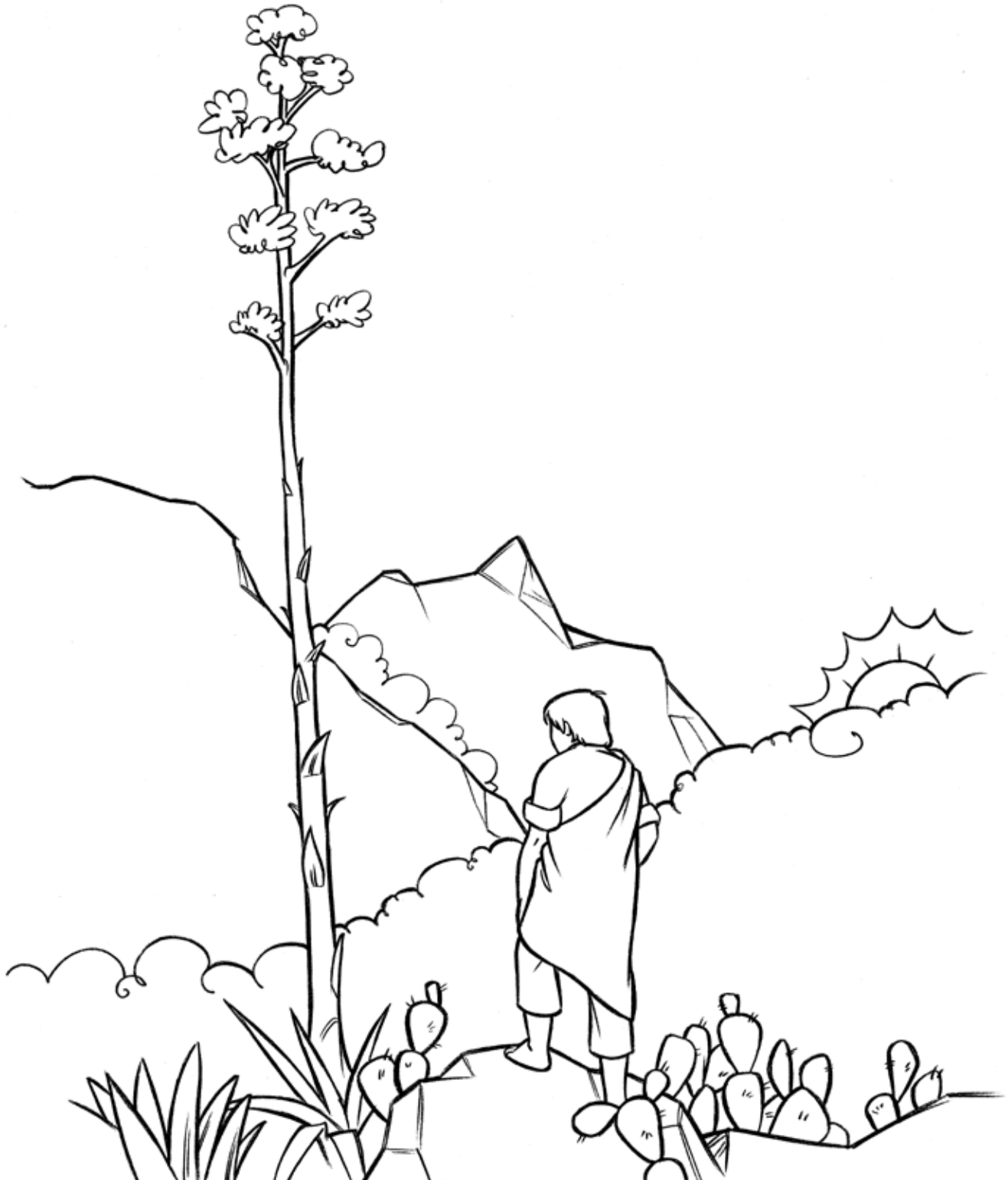
Among the first people to learn the Catholic faith were a humble Indian and his wife. They asked to be baptized and chose new Christian names: Juan Diego and Maria Lucia. Juan Diego and Maria Lucia loved their new Faith. Very early in the morning, they would walk 15 miles through the desert to attend Mass and catechism classes. It was often windy and cold, so Juan usually wore a “tilma,” an Indian poncho.

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One day, Maria became very sick and died. Juan Diego was lonely,
but he prayed daily for his wife and moved in with his old uncle, Bernardino, to care for him.

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On December 9, 1531, Juan Diego began his long, early morning trip to church.
Suddenly, he heard beautiful songs from the top of Tepayac Hill.

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When he looked up, he heard a woman’s voice call his name: “Juanito! Juan Dieguito!” (“Little John! Little John Diego!”)
He climbed the hill. At the top, he saw a beautiful dark-skinned lady.

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“Juanito, the most humble of my sons,” the beautiful lady said in Juan Diego’s native Indian language.
“I am the ever virgin Mary, Mother of the True God. I wish a chapel to be built in this place. Go and tell the bishop what I desire.”

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Juan Diego ran to see the Bishop, Juan de Zumárraga. But the bishop only said, “I will give thought to your request.”

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Juan Diego went back to the top of Tepayac, where Mary was waiting. “I have failed. Please send someone else to the bishop,” he pleaded. “My little son,” Mary responded. “There are many I could send, but you are the one I have chosen.”

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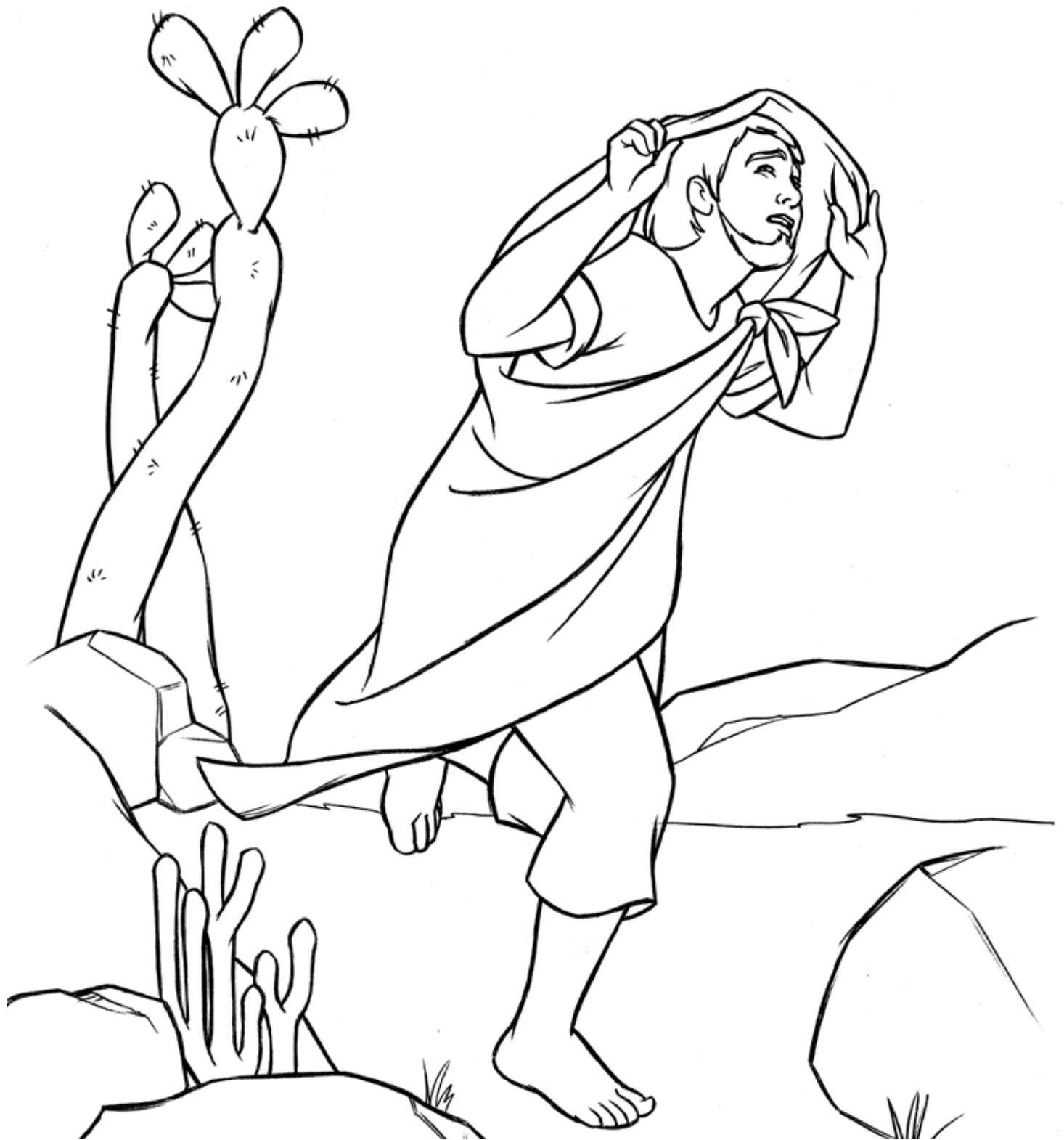
On Sunday, immediately after Mass, Juan Diego returned to the bishop. “I must have proof, a sign from the Lady, before I can believe you,” said the bishop. Elated, Juan Diego rushed back to Tepayac hill to speak to Our Blessed Mother. She instructed him to return the next day to receive a sign for the bishop.

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But Juan Diego did not return the next day! Uncle Bernardino had become ill, and Juan Diego spent all day nursing him. Finally, Uncle Bernardino thought he was about to die. He asked Juan to get a priest to hear his confession and anoint him before death.

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On Tuesday, December 12, Juan Diego ran to get a priest. He had to pass Tepayac Hill. He hoped Our Lady would not see him, so he tried to run around it the other way.

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But Mary came down from the hilltop to meet him. “My little son! Where are you going?” Juan fell to his knees and began to weep. He explained that he must get a priest for his dying uncle, but told her that he would come back tomorrow.

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“Do not be distressed, my littlest son. Am I not here, your mother? Are you not under my protection? Your uncle will not die now. His health is restored at this moment. There is no need to get a priest,” she said. Meanwhile, Our Lady appeared to Uncle Bernardino. He was cured! Mary told him, “Call me Santa Maria de Guadalupe.” In English, we say, “Our Lady of Guadalupe.”

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“Go now to the top of the hill and cut the flowers that are growing there, then bring them to me.”
Juan obediently climbed the hill. To his amazement, Juan Diego found fresh roses of many colors at the top of the hill.
Roses in winter—a miracle! He gathered many into his “tilma” and carried them down the hill.

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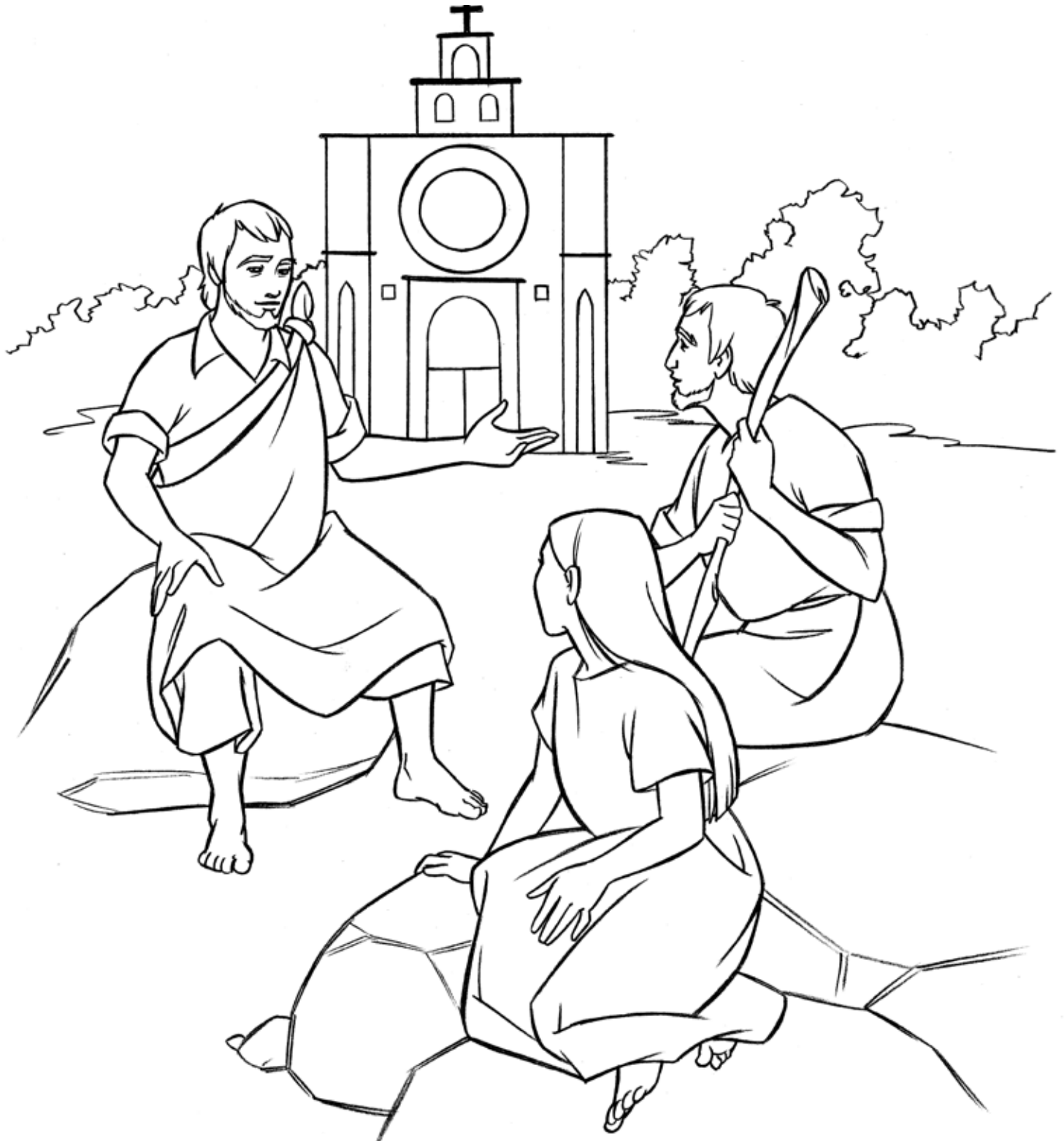
Our Blessed Mother carefully arranged the flowers in his tilma, then closed it around them. “Do not unfold your tilma and show these flowers to anyone but the bishop,” she said.

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Juan Diego hurried to the bishop’s house. Juan Diego opened his tilma to show the bishop the miraculous roses. Then an even greater miracle appeared: an image of the beautiful lady surrounded by the sun!

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Bishop Zumárraga made Juan Diego a full-time missionary. Juan worked every day in the new chapel on Tepayac Hill. He told many pilgrims the story of the miraculous image. Millions of Mexicans converted and were baptized into the Catholic Church!

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500 years later the miraculous image of Our Lady is still on the tilma! It hangs in the new great basilica in Mexico City. Just like Saint Juan Diego, anyone who goes there can now see “Our Lady of Guadalupe.”