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Quick Search

Not In Print
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Film Finder
Columnists
- Kirby
- Television
- Movies
- Culture Vulture
Front Page
Contents
Past Editions
Search
Archives
Weather
Columnists
Obituaries
Today's Page 1
Help Desk
Classifieds
Cars/RVs
Real Estate
Jobs
Education Guide
Utah Bride Guide
Utah City Guide
Shopping Guide
Grocery Guru
Fantasy Sports
TV Week
Advertising Info
Bus./Industry
Nation/World
Utah
Business
Sports
Editorials
- Commentary
- Public Forum
Lifestyle
Arts
Travel
Food
Health/Science
Body & Soul

Saint's relic makes tour stop in Utah

By Rhina Guidos

The Salt Lake Tribune

Maria Angeles Reyes' oldest child came into the world as a sick baby.

When the family took little Ana Gabriela to the hospital, they prayed to the Virgin of Guadalupe to help them in their time of need. The child eventually got better, and ever since the Reyes have given their thanks to the Virgin by visiting her image whenever they are in Mexico City.

But now, a bit of the Virgin Mary and of a Mexican saint is coming to visit them.

On Wednesday, a piece of cloth cut from a cloak believed by many Catholics to have belonged to a peasant named Juan Diego is arriving in Salt Lake City. Catholic lore has it that in 1531, the Virgin appeared to the indigenous peasant in Mount Tepeyac near Mexico City and asked him to build a chapel to honor her.

The local bishop didn't believe Diego's story of the apparition, so the Virgin is said to have left her image on the peasant's cloak as proof. Now that cloak, referred to as the Tilma of Tepeyac, hangs in Mexico City's Guadalupe Basilica.

Since June, a half-inch piece of cloth taken from that



Visitors touch and kiss the Plexiglas case containing a piece of the "Tilma of Tepeyac," at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church, in Tucson, Ariz., on Thursday. (Aaron J. Latham/The Associated Press)

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cloak has been making its way through some two dozen Catholic churches around the United States, drawing thousands of visitors at each stop.

Devotees of the Virgin and of Diego -- who was canonized amid controversy last year -- are thrilled about the visit.

"This is a beautiful event," said Mari Cruz Gray of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City. "It is especial for Hispanics because [the Virgin] is the empress of the Americas. This small piece of cloth is coming so we can venerate her. It comes here for the faithful. We can't go to Mexico City, but we can go to Draper."

The relic arrives in Salt Lake City on Wednesday and will be taken to Draper's Juan Diego Catholic High School, where it will remain until Nov. 8. Times of veneration have been scheduled for Thursday, Friday and Saturday, and Masses will be said in English and Spanish. (See schedule.)

The relic has been in the United States since 1941, when the archbishop of Mexico City gave it to the archbishop of Los Angeles as a gift after he led a pilgrimage to the Guadalupe Basilica. The Los Angeles Diocese organized this year's U.S. tour to mark the first year of Diego's sainthood.

Some in the Catholic church don't believe Diego ever existed. Despite protests by some priests who said the tale of Diego and the Virgin was told to draw more indigenous people toward the Catholic Church, the Pope canonized the peasant this year.

To believers like Reyes, disagreements among church officials are unimportant. She believes in Saint Juan Diego and said that he was chosen by the Virgin because of his pure heart. She is proud that the church recognized Mexico's indigenous people through him.

But some don't think the church has recognized the American indigenous people.

When the church unveiled its official image of Diego last year to celebrate his sainthood, the official portrait was not of an dark-skinned man that had been the Mexican portrayal for centuries. Instead, the image was of a light-skinned European.

Reyes didn't even want to talk about controversy.

"The important thing," she said, "is to have faith."

Schedule of the Tilma of Tepeyac in Salt Lake City

* Wednesday: Tilma arrives in Salt Lake City in the evening, taken to Diocesan Pastoral Center and Bishop George Neiderauer

* Thursday:

7:30 a.m.: the Tilma is taken to the Cathedral of the Madeleine, Salt Lake City, where Knights of Columbus, clergy, dignitaries and Juan Diego Catholic High School Ambassadors assemble; the relic then is taken by motorcade to Skaggs Catholic Center, 300 E. 118000 South, Draper.

9 a.m.: Mass in the high school auditorium

10 a.m.: veneration of the Tilma open to students and Catholic groups every two hours.



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* Friday:
 10 a.m.-6 p.m.: veneration open to the public
 6 p.m.: Mass in Spanish at St. John the Baptist Church

* Saturday:
 10 a.m.-4 p.m.: veneration open to the public
 5 p.m.: Mass in English at St. John the Baptist Church

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 Schedule of the Tilma of Tepeyac in Salt Lake City

Wednesday, Nov. 5
 Tilma arrives in Salt Lake City in the evening, taken to Diocesan Pastoral Center and Bishop George Neiderauer

Thursday, Nov. 6
 7:30 a.m., the Tilma is taken to the Cathedral of the Madeleine, Salt Lake City, where Knights of Columbus, clergy, dignitaries and Juan Diego Catholic High School Ambassadors assemble; the relic then is taken by motorcade to Skaggs Catholic Center, 300 E. 118000 South, Draper
 9:00 a.m., Mass in the high school auditorium
 10 a.m., veneration of the Tilma open to students and Catholic groups every two hours.

Friday, Nov. 7
 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., veneration open to the public
 6 p.m., Mass in Spanish at St. John the Baptist Church

Saturday, Nov. 8
 10 a.m. - 4 p.m., veneration open to the public
 5 p.m., Mass in English at St. John the Baptist Church

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