

The Virgin of Zapopan: bound for Mexican Fiesta!

by Kerri Krueger | August 2008



Milwaukee's Mexican Fiesta will have a special guest this year. The Virgin of Zapopan will be traveling all the way from Zapopan, Mexico to visit the festival where she will be available for viewing during normal festival hours. This is the first time the Virgin is going to make this long trip to the Summerfest Grounds and it is sure to be a special occasion.

Do you know where the Virgin of Zapopan came from?

In 1541, Francisco de Bobadilla founded the city of Tzapopa in the State of Jalisco, later renamed Zapopan which nowadays is part of the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area. Friars came to the area shortly after, hoping to evangelize to those who lived there. For the occasion, Fray Antonio de Segovia brought a statue of the Virgin Mary to Tzapopa which was located in the middle of Indian Territory. The friar went before the Indians with a crucifix and the statue in hopes of avoiding bloodshed. Legend says the statue began to emit a blue twinkle, causing the Indians to lay down their arms.

Once upon a time...

Shortly after this miracle, a shrine to the Virgin was erected and a feast in her honor was set on December 9th. In 1641, the chapel was transferred to the diocesan clergy and the date of the feast was moved to December 18th, a week before Christmas. The Virgin's name was also changed to Nuestra Señora de la Expectación (Our Lady of Expectation). People kept her original name but for years she has been known as La Generala or Zapopanita.

Since the Virgin of Zapopan arrived in Mexico in 1541, miracles have reportedly occurred. In 1721 the city of Guadalajara was confronted with the plague so the Virgin was transported there to protect the inhabitants. In 1734, the Virgin was named Patroness against storms and lightning and, in 1821, Patroness of the State of Jalisco. On January 18th of the year 1921, for the joy of all her followers, the Virgin of Zapopan was canonically crowned.

Today, the Virgin is the patron saint of Guadalajara and is highly revered by millions. Many still believe she can perform miracles.

The Procession

Each year, on October 12th at dawn, the 10-inch statue of the Virgin of Zapopan begins her four-month voyage to all of the churches within Guadalajara, Jalisco. She starts the journey at her home in the Basilica of Our Lady of Zapopan and visits each church for a week before moving on. Some of the churches hold celebrations in honor of the Virgin's visit. Devotees can be seen crawling on their knees from the church entrances all the way to the first pew.

After visiting every church in the city, the Virgin's tour ends at the Guadalajara Cathedral. The homecoming celebration is a very large and festive gathering. The Virgin makes her procession inside a large car that is pulled by many devotees. Millions of others escort her back to her home town for a well deserved rest.

This year it will be your turn to dedicate your prayers to the Virgin of Zapopan thanks to the efforts of Mexican Fiesta. An opportunity you cannot miss!

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