



Documentary Film Background: *The Needle and the Thread*

The Needle and the Thread tells the remarkable story of an extraordinary Spanish nun: a mystic, advisor to the King of Spain, best-selling author, founder of a religious order and the first woman to successfully evangelize in the New World. But how did she evangelize to the Jumanos peoples in their own language, while in the New World, without leaving Spain? Is it possible to be in two places at once? According to the reported history, while thousands of miles away in Ágreda, Spain and in deep prayer she purportedly levitated in an aura of blue light. It was during these times that she claimed to have been transported by the help of angels to the Jumanos settlements. There were numerous reported visits occurring most frequently for approximately three years beginning in 1620 and according to substantiated reports, all of the visits occurred while the nun physically remained in the convent located in Ágreda, Spain.

The occasion of appearing in two places at once is called bilocation and although scientifically unsubstantiated the mystery of Sor María de Ágreda (1602-1665), known also as the Lady in Blue, remains to the Jumanos a sacred part of their history.

Today the Jumanos live in what is now modern New Mexico and Texas but centuries before, their ancestors requested missionaries to come baptize them. Prior to responding, the Catholic overseer of the region Father Alonzo de Benavides, inquired as to why the Jumanos wanted to be baptized. They responded to his inquiry by relating that they had been visited by a Lady in Blue who had told them to turn to the Church. In response Father Benavides sent Franciscan Friar Juan de Salas to visit them in 1629.

Father Salas found little difference in the accounts that had been reported. The Jumanos indicated that the Lady in Blue had visited them in the area now known as the Salinas National Monument, near Albuquerque.

In June, 2014, a pilgrimage of the faithful Jumanos took place to honor the Lady in Blue. The doctors of a young girl on the pilgrimage, reputed to be suffering from cancer, later reported that she has no cancer. Could it be simply a medical error? A miracle? A healing by faith? Examinations of Sister María de Jesús de Ágreda's body contained in her casket at the monastery where she had lived in the 17th century reportedly show that the state of the body showed no signs of rot and decay after death. Could this represent the condition defined as incorruptible?

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These questions and others together with seemingly miraculous events fascinated a local historian, Dr. Henry J. Casso who contacted documentary filmmaker/director Victor Mancilla in 2014. Dr. Casso invited Mr. Mancilla to explore and record the story of the Lady in Blue. "The power of faith has healed many people," said Dr. Casso, "And this story, much like a great tapestry will emerge stitched together with needle and thread for the Jumanos and others to judge, to believe or not believe."

In addition to her relationship with the Jumano, Sor Maria's legacy is in part reflected in the fourteen books she authored. Her signature work, [*The Mystical City of God*](#), the biography of Mary (mother of Jesus), is studied today in college and university programs of Spanish language and culture. It has been translated into over ten languages and is said to have been the only other books besides the Bible that Saint Junipero Serra brought with him from Spain to the New World, helping to inspire his evangelical work in the Missions of California. Sor Maria, may have converted more people to Christianity, perhaps more than any other woman in her time.

Over six-hundred letters exist between her and King Philip IV of Spain (whom she advised spiritually for 22 years). The letters show a unique relationship between the two and may have helped save her from the Inquisition which likely resulted as a result of jealousy attributed to Sor Maria's spirituality and gifts that are believed to have been viewed as threatening to those in power in her time.

Who was this woman? Yet as times have changed, there is now renewed interest in seeking her beatification. Lastly, as testimony to the significance of her story, the documentary was granted a rare Pontifical Approval from the Catholic Church.

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