

### **Pueblo of Acoma: Santa Maria Feast Day**

Growing up in New Mexico I have had the pleasure of attending many Native American Religious ceremonies, mostly from Indian Pueblos In northern New Mexico, since my hometown Albuquerque is surrounded by reservation and Pueblos. The Native American ceremony that is my favorite to attend year in and year out is the Pueblo of Acoma's feast day for Saint Maria. There are plenty of reasons this ceremony has been my favorite since first attending in 2007. One is simply because the Acoma Pueblo (or sky city) is located secretly on top of a plateau 60 miles away from Albuquerque in the New Mexico northern high desert. This location is so remote that there is only one road that leads to the top of the plateau, where a massive village made up of adobe houses is found in the middle of nowhere. This adds a sense of mystery to the pueblo's already ancient mystique.

The Feast of Maria is a very interesting event to attend, because it is a blend of Acoma Indian and Spanish Catholicism cultures and beliefs. The Spanish brought Roman Catholic teachings and forcefully converted thousands of Native Americans during their exploration of the new world. The Acoma people were among those forcibly converted by the Spanish. They had to adapt their cultural religious ceremonies to fit their long cultural traditions with new-found Roman Catholic religion. The feast day in its traditional meaning for The Pueblo is to celebrate the harvest of the past year and to thank their spirits for all their land given to the people. They do this by making sacrifices to the spirits; also by performing traditional Acoma holy dances to the beats of the ancestors' drum of life. The modern feast day is now celebrated both with traditional ceremonial values and the Roman Catholic ideals of celebrating the day with a massive feast in honor of the pueblo's patron saint Maria.

This ceremony is unique to witness since it is the blending of the values and ideals of two different religions. The mix of ancient Acoma prayers, stories and Roman Catholic hymns makes up a form of Native American Catholicism that can't be found anywhere else in the world and is truly a national treasure.