

A Gypsy Christmas

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The Great ExchangeTwo gypsies appeared before the Pearly Gates. St. Peter frowned, "You guys are looking for Nirvana-second gate down. No, they said, we want to come into heaven. But you guys are Hindus!" said St. Peter. "No, they said, we're ELKS Lutherans. Look, I know you," Peter said. "You're Hindus-second gate-down!" No, the gypsies chorused again, we want to get into heaven. Can't you please ask God for us? So, St. Peter reluctantly marched off and presented their case. Astounded, he heard God say, "Well, I suppose we could give it a try-let them in." So, St. Peter marched sedately back from the throne & but moments later came racing back with hair and beard streaming behind, shouting "they're gone, they're gone!" "The gypsies are gone?" God asked. "No! The Pearly Gates!"

Gypsy immediately brings to mind stereotypes. Fortune telling, horse trading and traveling caravans are part of the profile. But today's reality is in some ways different. Charlie Chaplin (comedian), Django Reinhardt (musician), and Isabel Pantoja (singer) are but a few famous gypsies. Nowadays the group is collectively known as Romani although also as Roma, Gitanos, Sinti and other. The only ethnic group in the world that do not lay claim to a particular country; their DNA has been traced to India and it suggests that the Romani people are descendants of the Jat from northern India/Pakistan. The word gypsy is a derivative of Egyptian. They arrived in the Middle East about 1000 A.D., an intelligent people who lived on their wits and found it easy to impress uneducated locals. At the time, being on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land was the ultimate status symbol and supporting those who were was the next best thing. The new immigrants claimed they had been ejected from their homeland (Egypt) and that they were on pilgrimage. Therefore, soon the little Egyptians were under the protection of kings throughout Europe. But this guise did not last forever and eventually gypsies gained the reputation of being thieves and pick pockets. During Nazi Germany persecution of gypsies reached its height and hundreds of thousands faced genocide, to this day, they continue to be shunned and persecuted.

Everyday we see gypsies on the street we live in Ternopil, Ukraine. They comprise a significant segment of Europe's population, especially Eastern Europe. Gypsy children occasionally come to our house to beg and pet the dog, but instead of money they get toothpaste and soap; giggling in appreciation. The Romany language has been an important unifying force to traditional Romani gypsies who have a strict social structure based on Hindu purity laws and tend to keep to themselves; regarding non-gypsies as pollutants to their traditions and customs. However, many gypsy groups have taken up the language and religion of the region within which they live.

Christmas came early for the gypsies of Mukachavo, Ukraine.

Medical Clinic on Wheels (MCOW) - Gift of Life was invited to a large gypsy village near the Carpathian mountains by the Canadian organization HART. MCOW staff were reluctant (to say the least) as to locating in a gypsy village. Americans often think of gypsies as colorful, mysterious and romantic but they don't usually live among them. MCOW staff were pleasantly surprised at the appreciation and respect that was shown in Mukachavo and-YES, we returned with all our hubcaps!

Everyone wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die and just because they don't doesn't mean they won't. We should feel sorry for those poor guys who could have gotten into heaven and all they managed was the Pearly Gates! But -eternity is coming and it's no joke. So, how can I ever know if I am going to heaven? The Ukrainian Lutheran Church deaconess, Ludmyla, told the Christmas story of Jesus come to earth, born of Mary, but she began by telling the gypsy children that the devil is a liar and all people have sinned and are condemned in God's eyes (Romans 3:23).

She continued by telling them that trying to make up for our sins doesn't solve the problem. God wants us to compare ourselves to Him and that gets to be a very big problem (Proverbs 16:25). But God Himself has a remedy for the situation through his son Jesus Christ. Jesus was born completely human, just like us in every way except one. He had no sin. None! Jesus became the perfect sacrifice for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) -The Great Exchange- We have been redeemed and can now boldly say God loves us! His love and mercy we do not deserve (Titus 3:5). His word is the Bible the only perfect truth (Romans 1:16) and in that way she told them Christmas is year round. Christmas is for everyone!

Ukraine, I bring you the most joyful news ever announced, and it is for everyone! The Savior, yes the Messiah, the Lord has been born tonight in Bethlehem!

Khristos rodyvsya! Christ is born! Slavita Yoho! Let us glorify Him!

Nicholas and Kerry Laper
and Gift of Life staff