

## Great Expectations of Love

1 John 4:7-12

NUCC Traditional

23 December 2018

Kathryn Wright is one of my nieces. To say that she is precocious and lives in Houston does not identify her clearly, because all three of my nieces are precocious and live in Houston. She is the oldest child of my sister Anna and brother-in-law, J.T.

She has a mesmerizing smile and a “Shirley Temple-esque” way about her. One of the habits that she has formed early in her very young life is that each night as she is going to bed, she says her prayers. And at three years of age, her prayers are a listing of each person in her family, including my dog. She will repeat names in this sort of ever-running loop as an attempt to avoid going to bed, and it’s adorable to experience.

But what I appreciate most about this early habit of faith is that Kathryn Wright does not refer to it as prayer, she says to her mom or her dad that she wants to tell them “who she loves.” You see, for Kathryn Wright’s three-year-old mind and faith, words like faith, gratitude and love are interchangeable. She does not see prayer as an act of listing off demands of God, nor does she see God as a Santa Claus in the clouds simply granting our every wish. Nor does she experience love as a one-sided emotion where you are supposed to simply receive all the affection and all the attention.

The innocence of Kathryn Wright’s three-year old understanding of love is that it comes first from her parents and then from her grandparents and family. And what **we** know is that it came first from God, a God so loving that God was willing to be a vulnerable infant in a foreign land, threatened by a king but visited by wise ones. And God’s love was so pure that it pierced the night sky and was glorified by angels.

I will confess that I did most of my Christmas shopping yesterday. You know, the kind of shopping that knows no budget, and I wonder how I will fit it all into my luggage when I fly to Texas on Christmas Day. But you must have gifts when you arrive and when it's December 22 most bets are off.

I was comforted, however, by the clear indication that I was in good company. Half of Collier County was at the area stores with me and almost as frantic as I was. We are all trying to show expressions of love all because the Wise Ones from the East came and brought gifts to Jesus, and, if we're honest, rather impractical ones at that.

I stress, and I laugh, but the reality is that, like you, I do it with joy. Because I can hear the voice of my niece, each night listing whom she loves. Her love so boundless that it includes my dog.

And I think about how that represents God's love. A love so broad and boundless that it includes all people. A love so necessary that God sent Jesus to show us ways of hope, peace, joy, and love. A love so tender that it could only be shown in the vulnerability of a newborn. A love so great that Jesus challenged the power of his day and spoke of our call to act in peace-filled ways.

The hour is drawing near when no more preparations can be made except the ones in your heart, where no store will be open except what you offer from soul. And so we invite you today, in the spirit of this season, to breathe peace, to receive the greatest gift ever given, and to prepare once again to hear the greatest story ever told. Because it is, without a doubt, a story of God's unfailing and unfaltering love.