Since I have arrived at St. Mary’s Parish, I have some experiences that I have never ever had before. When I moved into my office, I found out that I had a deck that overlooked Spa Creek. I crowned the Homecoming Queen at a football game. I got to dress up in a real fire fighter suit and even use a real fire hose when the Annapolis Fire Department visited St. Mary’s pre K. I was more excited than the kids. I have had ribs at *Buddy Crabs and Ribs.* This past week, I joined our parish school children at Barnes and Noble and read the Story of *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. There are some great perks to being pastor here.

The days leading up to Christmas often can touch the emotional heart stings in many of us. Seeing the joy of a little child seeing Santa, the ring of the Salvation Army bell ringer, hearing *of Chestnuts Resting on an Open Fire, I’ll be home for Christmas*, or *Silent Night*. The song of the angels, *Peace on Earth to all of good people of good* will is a deep prayer in our hearts. One of the most powerful desires at Christmas is to be at peace with God and our fellow human beings. I was thinking of three of the classic Christmas stories are about reconciliation. Spoiler Alert! If you do not know the endings of three stories, you need to watch ten hours of the Hallmark Station on television. The grumpy Grinch who wanted to steal Christmas from the people of Who Ville has a heart that is two sizes too small. But when all the people of Who Ville find themselves still happy after all is stolen, realizing that Christmas is far more than material things, they start singing a Christmas song. The sound of the song goes up the mountain where the Grinch lives. He is so moved by the moving response of the Who-Ville that his small heart to grow three sizes and a great conversion takes place in him and he restores all the Christmas gifts and joins the people in celebration. Perhaps, the most famous of Christmas novels is that of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. To be called a Scrooge is no compliment. Scrooge is universally known as the miserly Mister anti-Christmas. Again, going through his experience of the three ghosts of Christmases past, present and future completely transforms Ebenezer Scrooge into a great celebrator of Christmas who spends his wealth on the needy. Finally, my all-Christmas favorite holiday movie is *it’s a Wonderful Life,* starring Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey is to me more than a sentimental story; I think it is profound meditation on the meaning of life. Upsetting news from the Saving and Loan Company he runs leads him to grow very despondent. He begins to think his entire life was a great failure and disappointment. He cries out that the world would have been better if I had never been born. Those sad words bring forth Clarence the Angel who is seeking to earn his wings. This odd angel shows him what the world would have been like if George had never been born. George begins to see how many lives he impacted and how sad those he loved would be without him. He, like Scrooge and the Grinch, has a great change of heart and he proclaims what is the title movie: *It’s a wonderful Life*. I love these three stories of Christmas conversion.

What is the size of your heart this Christmas season? Do we know and truly believe that our lives are wonderful gifts from God? Has any cynicism and anger filled our hearts as it did Scrooge? Is there someone we are not at peace with in this Advent Season? Is something calling us to make some situation right these days? Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah shows us what a world of reconciliation looks like:

*Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on my entire holy mountain.* How far we are from this beautiful vision. Wars plague humanity; terrorism beings great anxiety; our politics seemed filled with rancor; it is far easier to fear one another than to trust. We seek peace on earth but it seems so distant.

John the Baptist is a realist. He speaks directly: John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"* Isaiah shows us a world where all are reconciled; the Baptist John call us to change our own hearts and to let go of that which blocks us from love of God and neighbor. Christmas a time of joy. Advent is a good time to take stock, to examine our lives to see how well we follow the Lord, and to turn to God and pray to truly let go of our sins and embrace God in the mercy and reconciliation that he comes to being us in his birth

