In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 3 Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:1-5)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell… (Colossians 1:15-19)

I’m not quite sure why, but I have always loved this Sunday, the first Sunday of the year. People are rested, I am rested, we’ve spent the week celebrating, all around us the metaphorical calendar of our life is changing as we let go of what was and look forward to what will be. I’ve always considered it a privilege to preach on this morning, vainly and perhaps pridefully believing that maybe my words will somehow help someone embrace the new thing God is always doing in our lives. So happy new year church, and welcome to 2017.
There was a three-year-old boy whose parents brought him faithfully to worship at their church. The boy was quite fond of the choral music in the worship service, especially the choir director. From where the family usually sat, they could see the director conducting. When the choir would stand to sing, the three-year-old would raise his hands and conduct the choir, closing his eyes, and waving his hands, and smiling, sometimes laughing, hearing the music and the words with joy in his heart. It was adorable.

The pastor remarked about this to the parents and they told him this story. Sometimes when the child was at home watching cartoons on TV, on in a grocery cart with his mom, or taking a walk with his dad, or out playing in the backyard... far from church, with no choir in sight, the boy would grow still, close his eyes, and wave his hands, and smile, and laugh, and hear the music and the words with joy in his heart. Still adorable... but also profound. For this three-year-old had found a way to connect to the God who was not contained in a sanctuary made of stone, but alive and all around him, all the time, everywhere.

For the past eight Sundays, Ruth and I have shared with you some thoughts about specific images of Jesus Christ. We conclude this series today with some thoughts about the Cosmic Christ, an image of God which grows out of the Christmas story... that God is with us, enfleshed in the world... INCARNATE!

I should probably mention that the idea of the Cosmic Christ has not always been embraced by the powers that be in the Christian world. Mystics and saints who have embraced Jesus as Cosmic Christ have sometimes been excommunicated, persecuted, even martyred, yet the idea still flourishes in every generation. It speaks to me, powerfully, and I believe that it is the image of Jesus that holds the most promise for uniting all people everywhere in a common understanding of God.

Genesis 1 affirms that from out of chaos and nothingness, God created all that is, gave order to the universe, spoke a word and brought forth light, even before there was a sun, or a moon, or stars... The light was good in the eyes of God!

John reminds us that the light of creation, the light of God, LIGHT, shines in the darkness, invincible, and mysteriously present in the Word made flesh and dwelling in our midst.
A generation later, Saint Paul put the words into a hymn, a song, a liturgy and sent it to the followers of Jesus in the city Colossae:

15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.* 16 *He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* 18 *He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.* 19 *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,* 20 *and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)*

The Scriptures repeatedly describe a God who made all things and is in all things, things seen and unseen, things known and unknown, things that once were, and are today, and will be someday.

Father Richard Rohr, the contemplative Franciscan priest and writer, has said that Jesus has existed for 2000 years. We celebrated Jesus’ birth last week, we remember his life throughout the church year, and we’ve been doing that for two millennia. That’s a long time. Jesus is 2000 years old. But Christ is as older! Jesus is 2000 years old, but Christ is 14.5 billion years old, for the Christ was present at the beginning, when the universe began.

We mainline Christians sometimes forget that Christ is not Jesus’ last name. We get pretty excited about Jesus, as we should, for God is present in him in an amazing mysterious way! For 2000 years now we have focused our spiritual attention on this historical Jesus, and we have developed theologies that revolve around him because he is something we know, something we can understand, something we could touch, something like us.

But the Christ, the word of God, the light of God, the mystery of God is beyond Jesus. When we forget that Jesus is a 2000-year-old expression of something that existed from the beginning of time, and will exist until the end of time, we can get a bit possessive of a God who is bigger than we realize. We can get a bit proprietary about the ways we connect with this God. When we let Christ be a last name, and not the definitive element of the story of incarnation, we miss out on the Cosmic Christ, a picture of God which gives a more immense
understanding of salvation, a broader picture of how God is revealing and loving and present through everything that is.

Fortunately, down through the generations both before and after Jesus, there have been mystics who have reminded us of the Cosmic Christ, the presence of God in all things. The mystics tell us that our goal is to be one with this God of creation, to be one with the universe.

Have you ever thought about that word universe? It’s a big thing... bigger than we can imagine... made up of particles smaller than atoms, but expanding beyond the limits of solar systems and galaxies and galaxy clusters, held together by mysterious forces. It is both infinitesimal and immense at the same time. The word, UNIVERSE, from the Latin uni vertere, or one turn. Uni we get... it means one. Vertere is a bit more complicated. We get the word versus, as in the sentence, “In today’s game, the Seahawks versus the 49ers, the Seahawks will win!” Think of the commonly asked question, “Whose side are you on? On you on our side or their side?” But in God’s reality, in God’s creation, in God’s plan, there is only one side... a universe, and we are all on one side, one reality, one view.

The goal of faith, all faith, is to connect each of us to that unity, that oneness of God, which is revealed in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, but not necessarily limited to the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Hear me now, the story of Jesus fills us to overflowing with the promise that we are called to be with God, provides a framework for that spiritual journey, a framework that we call Christianity, with multiple variations that we call things like Methodist, Catholic, Quaker. It is a framework among many frameworks in the world, frameworks devised by humanity in response to the experiences of God that all around us, calling to us, seeking unity with us.

The mystics tell us that there is a cosmic allurement that draws us beyond ourselves to find community with one another and with God. This cosmic allurement keeps our universe from being centered in us alone. The allurement is not necessarily pleasant.

Suffering is a form of allurement. You see, when we are satisfied with the status quo, there is little motivation to change or to grow. And suffering in all its forms creates dis-satisfaction within us, encouraging us to try something different. When things aren’t working for us, when we aren’t in control, when we aren’t
getting our own way, we change, and hopefully things get better... progress happens... we move closer to God.

Of course, this cosmic allurement also comes in other, more positive, ways than suffering. Things attract us to God... things like beauty, wonder, truth, goodness, love. We see these things, we admire these things, we embrace these things, and somehow, we feel connected to something bigger than ourselves... we feel connected to God.

There is one other cosmic allurement that I want you to remember today, and that is community, relationship with one another. Richard Rohr says that like all human beings he has days when he wakes up on the wrong side of the bed. One of his duties is to preside at the morning mass. So he goes to the chapel, and though grumpy, presides at the mass. Now there is a place in the mass where the peace is exchanged, and Father Rohr steps down in all his grumpiness from the altar and greets those who have come to communion. People shake his hand, old ladies hug him, children nervously smile at him, and when he steps back up on the altar, somehow, miraculously, the grumpiness is gone from his heart. “Where did my grumpiness go?” he wonders. He knows that when he allowed others into that moment, when he embraced the other, God came into the place of darkness in his heart, and filled it with light, the same light the shone in the darkness at the beginning of time, the same light which was in Jesus Christ which the darkness could not extinguish, the same light that is in each us. God pulls us out of our little selves and unites us with the larger truth that God is in all of us. When we reach that place of understanding we have taken a huge step toward the mystery of the unity of all that is, a step towards God.

When we come to this table, for a moment, we experience a uniting of our individual longings for God. It is a holy moment of connection that helps us to love one another, to love all that Christ loves, and to love the universe which God has made. Saint Augustine said these words when sharing the bread of communion: “Receive that which you are... the body of Christ.” You are the body of Christ! Remember this! This presence of God which was at the beginning and ever will, this power of God that filled Jesus, this Cosmic Christ. You are a part of it, and you come to the table to remember this truth and to become a little more
Christ-like, a little more God-focused, a little more connected to the oneness of all that is.

Christ is in you. God the holy, the sacred, the good, is not something 'out there' that you must figure out how to find. It's right here, in you, in the people around you. It is there waiting for you to close your eyes and hear the music and see the light within. God revealed this truth in the physical body a baby born in Bethlehem, in the incarnation. That birth was a cosmic reminder of God's first body, the creation. And this table is a cosmic promise of the new creation, the body of Christ in you, in all of us. You are holy and good. You are created in God's image. You are loved and accepted by God. Your worthiness is not something you have to prove. The Cosmic Christ, the indwelling God, reconciles us to one another and to God!

So, dear sisters and brothers, come to the table on this first day of a new year and meet again the Cosmic Christ who has been alive in the creation since God first spoke the Word and brought forth light. Come meet the Cosmic Christ who is the word that echoes in you, the light that shines through you. Come, receive that which you are. Receive the body of Christ! Amen.