

# Character Builder

# 您好學？

The basic unit of the Chinese language is the *zi* (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each *zi* has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string *zi* together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each *zi* is pronounced in one of four tones:

1<sup>st</sup> tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

2<sup>nd</sup> tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high

3<sup>rd</sup> tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high

4<sup>th</sup> tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each *zi* below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

## This week: Words about Lent

Putonghua pronunciation: *xian4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *hin3*

Meaning: offer, present, donate, display, contribute

獻 (radical 犬 *qūan3*, dog) implies 獻上 (*xian4 shang4* = offering-up) 祭品 (*ji4 pin3* = sacrificial-objects = sacrifice, e.g. lamb/dog), i.e. 獻祭 (*xian4 ji4* = offer-sacrifice). 獻給 (*xian4 gei3* = offer-to) means respectfully present/offer. Charity concert raises 獻金 (*xian4 jin1* = offer-gold/money = money donations). After singer 獻歌 (*xian4 ge1* = offer-song = sang a number), kid 獻花 (*xian4 hua1* = presented-her-with-a-bouquet).

Lackey follows boss around, 獻計 (*xian4 ji4* = offers-ideas/suggestions), 獻媚 (*xian4 mei2* = offers-charms/flattery). Mathematician 獻身 (*xian4 shen1* = gives-body/life to) research, makes many 貢獻 (*gong4 xian4* = tribute-offer = contributions).

In Lent Christians remember Jesus Christ 獻出生命 (*xian4 chu1 sheng1 ming4* = offering-out-life-fate = giving his own life, i.e. dying) for sinners.

by Diana Yue