

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:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged

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

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

4th 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

祈

Putonghua pronunciation: *qi2*

Cantonese pronunciation: *kei4*

Meaning: pray, beg, entreat, request, beseech

祈 has radical 礻 (= 示 *shi4*, reveal) indicating god-related: 神 (*shen2*, god/spirit), 祕 (*mi4*, secret/mystical), 禍 (*huo4*, heaven-sent calamity), 福 (*fu2*, heaven-sent blessing), 祂 (*ta1*, pronoun for "god"), 祝 (*zhu1*, bless/wish we), 祐 (*you4*, bless). 祈 means pray/entreat. In grammar, 祈使句 (*qi2 shi3 ju4* = entreat-command-sentence) means imperative sentence.

Humans 祈求 (*qi2 qiu2* = pray-ask/beg for) gods' protection. Temple-goers 祈福 (*qi2 fu2* = pray/beg-for-blessings). In draught, shaman 祈雨 (*qi2 yu3* = prays-for-rain). In 天壇 (*Tian1 Tan2* = Beijing's Heavenly/Imperial-Altar), Chinese Emperor annually offered prayers/sacrifices at 祈年殿 (*Qi2 Nian2 Dian4* = pray-year-hall = Hall of Prayer for Year of Good Harvest).

In Lent, Christians recite 祈禱文 (*qi2 dao3 wen2* = ask-pray-texts = prayers) focusing on Christ's sufferings and crucifixion.

by Diana Yue