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.

This week: Words about Christmas

開 (dan) = give birth to baby. 聖誕節 (sheng dan jie = holy-birth-festival = Christmas) celebrates 基督 (Ji Du = “Christus”/“Christ”-transliterated) 誕生 (dan sheng = born-live).


Buddhists observe 觀音華誕 (Guan Yin hua dan = Guan-yin-grand-birthday = festival celebrating the birthday of Guanyin, Goddess of Mercy).

Pronunciation: dan (Putonghua, 2nd tone), daan (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: birth, give birth to, birthday

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