

Character Builder 您好嗎？

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 pregnancy

Putonghua pronunciation: *yun 4*

Cantonese pronunciation: *yan 6*

Meanings: bear womb, pregnancy

孕 = womb-bearing. Nature 孕育萬物 (*yun4 yu4 wan4 wu4* = bear-womb-breed/nurture~ten-thousand~things = gives life to all).

Couple who want children throw away 安全套 (*an1 quan2 tao4* = peace~safe~sac = condoms), 避孕藥 (*bi4 yun4 yao4* = avoid~pregnant~drugs = contraceptives). Woman detects 懷孕 (*huai2 yun4* = contain~womb = pregnancy) when 月經 (*yue4 jing1* = moon/monthly~cycle = menstruation) stops, is congratulated “有喜!” (*you2 xi3* = has~happiness = “Having baby is happy event!”) Embryo grows in 子宮 (*zi3 gong1* = son's~palace = uterus) during 孕婦 (*yun4 fu3* = pregnant~woman)'s 懷孕期 (*huai2 yun4 qi1* = pregnancy~period).

童貞女懷孕 (*tong2 zhen1 nu3 huai2 yun4* = child~virgin~girl~contain~womb = a virgin became pregnant) is cornerstone of Christian faith.