

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 12/4/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,


ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, December 5, you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those who are hungry and cold this time of year. Pray for agencies that seek to bring them the necessary help they need to survive. Ask that GOD bless those who work to deliver shelter and food to those who struggle in what can be very hard times.*

Does it bother you when people say or write “Xmas?” Why the X? Here’s a little teaching using the Greek alphabet that may help to put it in perspective.

First, the ichthus. Perhaps you’ve seen a fish symbol (a line curving above with another line curving below and crossing near the end) with the letters IXQYS inside. These letters in Greek spell the word ichthus which means fish. Early Christians, during times of persecution, would use this image to help identify other Christians while lessening the risk of outing themselves as a believer. If someone thought the person with whom they were speaking might be a follower of CHRIST, they would make that sweeping curve with their foot in the dirt. If the other was a believer, they would complete the fish image with another curve, and then erase the image before anyone else might notice. The fish symbol reminded them of JESUS’ call to the fishermen to be “fishers of men.” But the symbol also was a coded identification for JESUS. The letters of that word “ichthus” stood for a way of naming JESUS:

- I (iota) is the first letter for JESUS, the Greeks not having a J.
- X (chi), pronounced with a hard “ch” sound, is the first letter of CHRIST.
- Q (theta) is the first letter of THEOS, the Greek word for GOD.
- Y (upsilon), the Greeks using Y for U, is the first letter of UIOS (wee-os) meaning SON.
- S (sigma) is the first letter of SOTER (so-tair), or SAVIOR.

Ichthus became an acronym for JESUS CHRIST, GOD’S SON, SAVIOR.

One other letter you need to know is R, the Greek letter rho with an “r” sound, even though it looks like “p.” The first two letters of CHRIST are XR, pronounced chi-rho. Perhaps you’ve seen the often-combined symbol of a P with an X or an X turned like a cross at the bottom . This symbol means CHRIST because of the first two letters in Greek.

So, the X or chi (pronounced Ki or Kee) is the Christian symbol for CHRIST.

Now, Christmas comes originally from the “Mass for the Birth of CHRIST.” A mass in the Roman Catholic Church is a worship service, particularly with Holy Communion served. On December 25, the Church held a special mass for CHRIST’S birth called CHRIST’S Mass. This later was run together to what we today call Christmas. The season of Christmas begins on Christmas Day (the day of CHRIST’S Mass) and runs twelve days (the twelve days of Christmas) until Epiphany on January 6 when the Church celebrates the arrival of the wisemen or magi.

Getting back to the X, because it was the first letter of CHRIST, some theologians and pastors began using a kind of shorthand for Christmas by simply writing Xmas. That’s where it comes from and what it means. Now, I suspect there’s a lot of people who don’t know that this is what it means nor that the X is the first letter of CHRIST, but you can tell them so that they understand, too. That can be another opportunity to witness to your faith!

And I suppose also that if you hear somebody say, “Merry Xmas,” you could say to them, “Thank you. Are you a Xian?”

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey