

## THE "X" IN XMAS

In mathematics, "x" stands for the unknown, the mysterious element, the missing quantity in an equation. It's up to you to find out what it is. Sometimes its quite difficult to discover this elusive, this hidden quantity in the formula. If one is not good in arithmetic, one may sit and stare at an equation, until one is in a daze, and never, ever discover what the "x" stands for. For the dunces in the class, now called "underachievers", "x" remains an unknown quantity, and the formula is meaningless – no help to them; they don't understand it. They flunk.

In the same way, some of us flunk Christmas, flunk it flat. It is meaningless to us. We don't understand the formula. So, I will try to explain the Christmas formula to you.

Put it down on the blackboard of your brain like this:

**"X-M-A-S = Peace-on-earth"**

Right off, some underachiever says, "but I don't like the sound of the word 'Xmas'" So we send this dunce to the foot of the class and explain that "Xmas" is not at all the way the word is pronounced – that's just the way it looks. It's pronounced "Christmas". And why? Because that "X" isn't really an "X" at all. It's the way the Romans wrote the Greek letter "Chi". So what we're trying to find the meaning of is the "Chi" in "Christmas" that equals "peace-on-earth".

It's sad that some of us are such theological dunces (pardon me, "underachievers") that we can sit and stare at Christmas, stare at it, and stare at it, all the way from Thanksgiving day to December 25, stare at it until we are in a daze, and never understand it. We never make that wonderful discovery of what the "Chi" in Christmas" really stands for. It's beyond us. We are like the puzzled schoolboy sitting in panic before his incomprehensible arithmetic. We know something is going on, but we don't know what. The value that ought to be assigned to the "Chi" eludes us.



So we see the formula, in gay lights and colors, all around us. It's spelled out everywhere: "Christmas equals peace on earth".

But the quantity so many of us assign to the "Chi" in Christmas must be the wrong one, because the formula just doesn't work – not for us. We put a lot into Christmas. That's the truth. Think of all those cards and presents and parties, a great deal of decking the halls with holly – all that "fa-la-la", not to mention the "ou-la-la" too. But whatever we put into Christmas doesn't seem to make the formula work. For in spite of every bit of the frenzied effort we put into it, we don't seem to come out with much "peace", not on this earth. Thus -- for too many of us, Christmas just seems to produce more worries, more weariness, and tension, and not a few hurt feelings.

So every year, some of us flunk Christmas. We fail it again and again. We get to where we even dread it coming around. Oh we keep on trying to put something into it even if it doesn't work. But mostly we just stare at it – all those lights and things – until it's gone. And we're glad it's gone.

For the whole thing puzzles us. We don't understand why Christmas doesn't work for us. It obviously works for others. You can see it on their faces – they have a peace that passes our understanding.

Well – it seldom occurs to us, dunces that we are, that it's because we've assigned the wrong value to the "Chi" in Christmas. A lot of us think the "Chi" in Christmas stands for Santa Claus. That's a good American mistake. But Santa Claus obviously doesn't bring much "peace on earth" – at least not past the age of 12, for the more we have, the more miserable we may be. And others of us think the "Chi" in Christmas stands for the old Roman Saturnalia, but the fun of the feasting and the frolic only goes so far, not much farther than 40, and it produces little peace.



**Therefore, it's a true advent when it finally comes to us what the "Chi" in Christmas really stands for – (we've heard it all along – but we keep forgetting) that it stands, plainly and simply enough, for the living Christ. And the truth is, when his spirit of goodwill – honest, humble, outgoing goodwill – is alive in us, the formula works. For among men of goodwill, there is peace, even on this earth. For with them, God is well pleased.**

**And without God's goodwill, the kind, gentle, giving goodwill of the Master, no formula for peace on earth will ever work. How difficult to learn that.**

**So the "Chi" in Christmas is the Lord himself. His presence is the mysterious element in this celebration we call Christmas. He is the missing quantity in man's peace.**

**Let us pray:**

**O Lord Christ, don't let us miss Christmas again this year. Be not hidden from us in this feast. Be present with us. Be thou our gentleness and grace. Be our kindness and our goodwill. Be thou our peace. Now and always.**