

Welcome

Shabbat Shalom and welcome to Temple Beth-El! We are delighted that you are here to celebrate Shabbat with us this morning. Temple Beth-El, established in 1874, is the oldest Jewish congregation in San Antonio and a founding member of the Union for Reform Judaism. The present Temple building was dedicated in 1927 and most recently renovated in 2003.

The Meaning of Shabbat

When most people think of holidays, they think of annual celebrations, but in Judaism there is one holiday that occurs every week - the Sabbath. Known in Hebrew as Shabbat and in Yiddish as Shabbos, this holiday is central to Jewish Life.

Shabbat is a day of rest. However, it is not just a day to sleep late. The model of Sabbath rest can be found in Genesis 2:1-3: "The heaven and earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that God had been doing, and God ceased [rested] on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased [rested] from all the work of creation which God had done." Thus, the pattern of work and rest is woven into the very fabric of the universe. Rest means more than physical cessation of work. It implies taking oneself out of the ordinary, out of the routine...This kind of rest gives us the opportunity to re-create our spirit and restore our soul. Shabbat is a time that is set aside to take notice of the wonders around us. (ReformJudaism.org)

The Meaning of Bar/Bat Mitzvah

The words Bar/Bat Mitzvah mean "son/daughter of the commandment." According to Jewish tradition, when a child reaches the age of 13, they are mature enough to grasp the meaning of the mitzvot (commandments) and so becomes obligated to fulfill them. Reform Judaism is fully committed to equality for all children. Each child has identical roles in leading and participating in our worship services.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah, while generally celebrated as a ritual moment, is actually a chronological milestone. As a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, a young person enters the first phase of their Jewish religious adulthood. This is the time in a young person's life when they will begin to establish a sacred Reform Jewish way of life for themselves.

Reform Judaism regards Bar/Bat Mitzvah not only as time of coming of age but also as an educational attainment and an opportunity to celebrate the child's accomplishments. To demonstrate their knowledge and familiarity with the Shabbat prayers, our b'nai mitzvah lead the congregation in a significant portion of the Shabbat service both in Hebrew and English in addition to reading from the Torah (the Hebrew Bible). Each child also offers a d'var Torah-sharing their understanding and interpretation of the section of the Torah they will read publicly that Shabbat - and chooses a Prophetic text that connects with their Mitzvah project.

Shabbat Morning Services at Temple Beth-El

We begin worship with music and prayers that remind us of the blessings in our lives and our obligation to maintain a sacred community. We continue with the two main sections of the worship service as the Bar/Bat Mitzvah child is called forward to lead the congregation in prayer. They begin with the Bar'chu, the formal "Call to Worship," followed by two prayers. One praises God for creating and sustaining the world of nature, and the other extols

God for giving the Torah to the Jewish people in love. The congregation then communally recites the Sh'ma, the Jewish watchword of faith in one God, and continues with praise to God for delivering oppressed people from their captivity.

The congregation then rises for the Amidah, the second main section of Jewish worship. On the Sabbath, it contains seven basic themes: 1) Heritage, 2) God's Powers, 3) God's Holiness, 4) Holiness of the Sabbath Day, 5) Acceptance of Worship, 6) Thanksgiving, and 7) Peace. Before we pause for the Silent Meditation, the Rabbi offers a Prayer for Healing. We conclude this section by offering a communal prayer for peace.

The highlight of the Shabbat morning service is the public reading of the Torah. Each week a different section is read from one of the Five Books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.) Before the reading, the Torah scroll is passed from one generation to the next until the Bar/Bat Mitzvah steps forward with the Torah in their arms. This ritual reflects the importance of maintaining Jewish traditions and learning.

After a joyful hakafah (processional) with the Torah through the congregation, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah reads or chants the assigned verses of Torah with the appropriate blessings being offered before and after each reading. The Torah service concludes with the Bar/Bat Mitzvah offering a d'var Torah, sharing their own interpretation of the text and noting the significance of the day. Parents are then invited to share personal words of blessing for their child.

After the Torah is replaced in the Ark the Rabbi offers a personal charge and blessing. This is followed by presentations of a Bible, a Kiddush Cup, candlesticks, a tzedakah box for charitable contributions, and certificates to note the day.

The Rabbi leads us through the concluding sections of our service beginning with the Aleinu (Adoration). We pray for the speedy arrival of the Messianic Age, when war, bloodshed, and cruelty will be overcome and peace and love will prevail. The Rabbi then offers a memorial meditation before the names of deceased Temple members and relatives of members are read. The congregation then rises to recite Kaddish, a prayer which though connected with mourning, contains no reference to death, but speaks instead of faith in God's sovereignty and sanctity.

The service concludes with a song and the Rabbi's benediction followed by a brief ceremony of blessings over the Shabbat wine and challah (special ritual bread).