



Congregation Etz Chaim

Community, Spirituality, and You

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So, you've been invited to a

Bar/Bat Mitzvah ...Now What?

Mazel Tov (Congratulations)! You've received an invitation to a Bar or Bat Mitzvah at Congregation Etz Chaim! BUT, you don't know what a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is, let alone what to do, where to go and what to wear. Here is some information that should help you learn a little about our traditions and customs at our synagogue:

What is a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah?

Bar/Bat Mitzvah literally means "Son/Daughter of the Commandment." According to the Jewish tradition, the age of 13 is regarded as an age of spiritual, moral and religious maturity and obligation. By leading the community in prayer, reading from the Torah, reading selections from the Prophets and sharing their personal interpretations of the day's Torah portion, the child shows that they are responsible to observe the commandments (mitzvot) of the Torah. They have studied long and hard in preparation for this day.

Decorum: It is important for guests to remember that a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is a religious ceremony. People should act with dignity and maintain decorum. Cell phones should be silenced during the service and texting should be avoided. The taking of pictures is not allowed during the service. Personal conversations should be kept to a minimum. Guests should dress appropriately for a religious service. Girls may wear dresses or skirts, boys may wear a suit or nice pants, dress shirt (tie optional) and dress shoes.

What do I need to know about the service?

The service is conducted from a prayer book (siddur) written in Hebrew with English translations. The prayer book is opened and read from right to left. The student will lead the congregation in worship by reading prayers from the prayer book. The key part of the service is when the Torah is taken from the ark. A symbolic moment in the service occurs as the Torah is passed from one generation to the next with the Torah being placed in the student's arms. This shows how the generations are bound together in a chain of tradition, duty, compassion, faith and study. Family members and friends will be invited to recite the blessing before and after the readings from the Torah. The student will read excerpts from the weekly portion. After the Torah reading, the Torah will be lifted for all to see. This is done to show that the Torah is an open book and belongs to all people.

At various times throughout the service people will be asked to stand.

What will I see?

Kippah: Upon entering the sanctuary, people may wear a head covering called a kippah. Covering the head is a sign of respect.

Tallit: A tallit is a Jewish prayer shawl and worn by adults during prayer services. The student will be receiving his or her tallit, as they participate in the service as an adult member of the community.



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The Torah: The Torah is the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. It is the foundation of Judaism, containing the principles of the Jewish faith and history. The Torah is read on an annual cycle from start to finish. Each week the same consecutive portion is read at every Jewish synagogue throughout the world.

Ark: The ark is the ornamental closet where the Torah scrolls are kept.

Ner Tamid: An eternal light that hangs above the ark. This represents God's eternal presence in our everyday lives and communities.

After the Service: Immediately after the service we ask everyone to join us for the kiddush and hamotzi, blessings of thanks over the wine and challah (bread). Please refrain from eating and drinking until after the blessings are recited.

The Party: Sometimes there is a party to celebrate the Bar/Bat Mitzvah. This party can be immediately following the service or at another time. Since this portion of the celebration varies greatly, please see your invitation for information regarding this event.