As you arrive.....

Take a siddur (prayer book) and humash (Bible) from the bookshelf at the door. Men and boys cover their heads with a kipah (skullcap; also called yarmulke); you can find containers for them near the entrance. In our congregation, head-coverings are optional for women and girls, though many women in our congregation do cover their heads with kipot in the synagogue.

The Scenery:

Our synagogue building was built by the Star of Israel Congregation in 1915. Our office and educational annex was completed in the winter of 2000.

The raised platform at the front of the sanctuary is called the Bimah. From the Bimah, Rabbi Scheinberg and members of the congregation lead the community in prayer.

The Aron Kodesh (ark) holds the Torah scrolls, which are taken out and read during the study portion of our service. Above the aron kodesh is the Ner Tamid (eternal light), which represents God’s eternal presence among us.

Act I: The Preliminary Service: Birchot HaShachar and Psukei DeZimra

Birchot HaShachar (p. 61–82)

We have a tendency to take all the good things in our life for granted. In the Birchot HaShachar, or “Blessings of Dawn,” we look at everything in the world— the rooster’s crow, the beautiful sunrise, the renewal of our lives each day, the state of our health—as miracles and gifts from God. We literally “count our blessings.”

P’sukei D’Zimra: Verses of Song (p. 83–106)

One of the books of the Bible, the book of Psalms, is full of 150 poems and songs that the Levites used to sing in the Temple when it stood. During P’sukei D’Zimra, we sing some excerpts of these poems, which help us praise God and prepare us for the “core” of the service, which comes in the next two sections.

Act II: The Shma and its Blessings

This section of the service begins with the Barechu, the formal call to worship (p. 107). This is the point at which the leader of the service invites us all to pray as a unified community, rather than as separate individuals. This prayer is recited only in the presence of a minyan, a quorum of ten adult Jews.

In Jewish theology, there are three major ways in which God interacts with the world: creation, revelation, and redemption. At this point in the service, we recite three blessings, one for each of these. In between the “revelation” blessing and the “redemption” blessing, we also recite the Shma, which is the most important Jewish statement of faith.

The Shma (p. 112–113) is a series of three selections from the books of Deuteronomy and Numbers. In the first selection (Shma Yisrael ...)
Act III: The Amidah

The Amidah (p. 115-123) is certainly the central prayer in any Jewish worship service. In fact, the earliest name for the Amidah was T’fillah, which simply means “prayer.” This indicates that the Amidah was considered to be the Jewish prayer par excellence. Today, we refer to this prayer as the Amidah, meaning “standing prayer,” as it is recited silently while standing.

The Amidah is traditionally recited three times on weekdays: morning, afternoon, and evening. The weekday version of the Amidah includes 19 blessings, covering a wide range of prayers, petitions, and prayers of thanksgiving. The Shabbat version of the Amidah, however, consists solely of seven blessings. Just as we make an effort to rest on the Sabbath day, we also make an effort to afford God that privilege — so on Shabbat, we shorten the Amidah by skipping most of the petitions.

Act IV: The Torah Service

The reading of the Torah occupies a central position in the Shabbat morning service. First, the Ark is opened (p. 139) and a Torah scroll removed. (It is traditional to rise whenever the Ark is opened or whenever the Torah is lifted or carried.) After a Torah procession, it is opened on the reading table. Seven members of the congregation are called up for the honor of reading the blessings before and after each reading this honor is called an aliyah (standing), or having an aliyah.

The Torah is divided into 56 sections, (approximately) one for each week, so that the entire Torah can be read each year. The entire Jewish community reads the same Torah portion each week; Jewish calendars indicate the name of the Torah portion assigned to each week. Members of the congregation can follow along with the Torah reading, in Hebrew or English, in books called Humashim. During Shabbat morning services at the United Synagogue of Hoboken, the rabbi, or a member of the congregation, facilitates a discussion on a theme emanating from the Torah portion of the week.

Following the reading of the Torah, a member of the congregation is called up to lift the Torah by its handles and to display it, open, to the congregation. Another member of the congregation is called up to roll and dress the Torah scroll (geltik, rolling). Immediately after the Torah reader, a member of the congregation is called up to read the Haftarah, a selection from the Prophets which has been selected for the day. Following the Haftarah, there is another procession through the congregation, and the Torah scroll is returned to the Ark (p. 161-164).

Act V: The Musaf (Additional) Service

On Shabbat and holidays, an additional Amidah is recited which is very similar to the Amidah which was recited earlier in the service. In our congregation, sometimes this silent Amidah is followed by the reader’s repetition, and sometimes, to save time whenever the Ark is opened or whenever the Torah is lifted or carried.) After a Torah procession, it is opened on the reading table. Seven members of the congregation are called up for the honor of reading the blessings before and after each reading this honor is called an aliyah (standing), or having an aliyah.

The concluding prayer is Adon Olam (Lord of the world), (p. 187). This concluding song is always a congregational favorite. Despite its apparent simplicity, Adon Olam eloquently expresses profound theological truths: Jews simultaneously experience God as both transcendent (an all-powerful, eternal force in the world) and immanent (a supportive force dwelling within every person).

After the service, please join us for Kiddush. Curtain

At the United Synagogue of Hoboken, like many Conservative and Reform congregations, both boys and girls typically celebrate their attainment of the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah at age 13. Rabbi literally means “teacher,” and this continues to be the main function of a rabbi today. While rabbis often lead services, officiate at weddings and funerals, visit the sick, and give sermons, none of these functions is the exclusive province of a rabbi; any educated Jew may fulfill these functions under Jewish law. Rabbinical positions are filled by individuals who have completed specific courses of study in Talmudic and Jewish law and tradition. A rabbinical candidate must complete a certain number of semesters at a rabbinical seminary, and must also be a graduate of a rabbinical seminary.

In Conservative Judaism, women have been ordained as rabbis since 1985. (In fact, Rabbi Scheindlin’s two immediate predecessors at the United Synagogue of Hoboken were both women.)

Cast of Characters

Bar/Bat Mitzvah: Literally, “person to whom the commandments apply.” The beginning of adolescence (age 12 for girls, age 13 for boys) has traditionally marked the time when Jews become obligated to fulfill the commandments of the Torah. Several hundred years ago, it became customary to make a special celebration to mark this passage from childhood to adulthood. The young man or woman who is becoming a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is often called up to the Torah during the Shabbat morning services, reads the Haftarah, leads parts of the service, and shares some thoughts about the Torah portion with the congregation.

Thus, strictly speaking, the words Bar/Bat Mitzvah refer not to the event (as in “I went to a lovely Bar Mitzvah last week”), nor to the process (as in “The rabbi’s going to Bar Mitzvah him as soon as he’s ready”), rather, it refers to the 12- or 13-year-old himself/herself.

At the United Synagogue of Hoboken, like many Conservative and Reform congregations, both boys and girls typically celebrate their attainment of the age of Bar/Bat Mitzvah at age 13.

Rabbi Scheindlin’s two immediate predecessors at the United Synagogue of Hoboken were both women.

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