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Congregation Beth Ahabah

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Congregation Beth Ahabah

by Abigail Smalley

For my second field trip, I went to a Jewish temple. I went to the Congregation Beth Ahabah in the fall on Friday, October 24. This service was called a Shabbat Service, and I had no idea what that meant or what it would entail. I've usually only been to religious services in the morning, so attending one at 7:30 pm was a very different experience.

Two of my friends and I entered the building a few minutes before the service was to start. We were handed greeting cards and books. As soon as we passed the lobby and entered the room where the service was to be held, I was in complete awe. It was so beautiful! The ceiling was curved and high, with an intricate design in the peak. There was beautiful stained glass work all along both sides. Up at the front was an enormous gold organ. We looked around and chose a seat. There were only a few people there; some families with children, a few old couples. The Rabbi walked around the room greeting people before starting the service. He was very kind and welcoming.

Once the service started I was surprised to learn that their books were backwards. The beginning would be where most books end, and you flip the pages the other direction. This definitely threw me off. There was a woman at the front who was leading in song. For the most part the audience was not singing along, it was mostly just her. I was doing my best to follow along in the book, but it was tough because the pages would change

without them letting us know, and much of each page was in Hebrew. Luckily there was a nice girl sitting behind me who tapped my shoulder and showed the correct page number every now and then! I appreciate that a lot.

The singing was beautiful; her tone, the sound of the words, etc. The rabbi would read something in between songs, and we would read aloud with him on certain lines. This back and forth of singing and reading went on for quite some time. I was really intrigued; the English words on the pages were lovely and written with such beautiful words and messages. After this, we were introduced to a girl who was having her bat mitzvah the next day. She sang a beautiful passage in Hebrew, which was so brave! Then her parents came up on the stage with her and the rabbi congratulated them. Following this was a baby naming ceremony. I had not even heard of this; I'd only heard of baptism. The parents brought their sleeping baby up to the stage, where the rabbi held him. The rabbi congratulated the parents, and summarized the expectations of raising him in a godly way, and that the congregation would always be there for help or encouragement. He then gave the baby a full Hebrew name. This was a cool thing to experience, and the rabbi was so genuine and excited for them!

Next the same woman who led songs earlier got out a huge scroll, and read in a sing-songy way from the chapter of the Bible about Abram becoming Abraham. She would transition very

quickly from speaking in a very casual manner to singing some lines. It was, again, a little hard to follow, but interesting to hear. After putting away the scrolls the rabbi got ready to speak. He went on for quite a while. He was talking a lot about current Jewish culture in the Middle East, which related closely to what we heard in class from our speaker. At this time of night, it was hard to pay attention, but I did my best. I could not stay for the after service snack hour, but thanked the policeman who was at the door and went home. I had a really positive experience attending this service. I'm intrigued to maybe go again. I was impressed with the kindness, the beauty of the service and building, and the overall feeling I got. •

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