The Saint John’s Bible

The Saint John’s Bible Heritage Program is an international initiative for individuals and institutions to explore the artistic and spiritual beauty of *The Saint John’s Bible*. Through its primary offering, the Heritage Edition, communities around the world can use this gift of sacred art to ignite their spiritual imaginations for generations to come.

Planning and work began in 1995
First words penned 3/8/2000
Last word penned 5/9/2011

Scribe

Donald Jackson, one of the world's renowned calligraphers and the scribe to the House of Lords and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, had a lifetime dream of crafting a hand-written, hand-illuminated Bible. When he was 10 years old he wrote two goals on a piece of paper; he achieved them both (Queen's Scribe/Creating a Hand-Illuminated Bible). He still has that piece of paper. In 1995 Father Eric Hollas, OSB, a monk at Saint John's Abbey brought the idea to the community and they embraced Jackson's dream.

Tools

*The Saint John's Bible* is a work of art that unites scripture (NRSV) and illuminations that reflect the Word of God for a new millennium. The artwork contains cave drawings, DNA, The Hubble Telescope, the AIDS virus and the Twin Towers.

- **Ink:** Rare Chinese black ink (soot) made in the 1890's was used for all the calligraphy. Donald Jackson bought the inks from a company who was going out of business for project for pennies. At the completion of the Bible they only had 2 sticks left. Vermillion, lapis lazuli, and other cakes and powdered pigments are used for color. The materials are mixed with egg yolk and water to make paint that is thicker than the black ink and loaded onto the quills using brushes.

- **Quills:** All the script is written using quills hand-cut by the scribes. Only the largest flight feathers, called 'primaries,' are used: goose quills for the main body of text, turkey and swan quills for heavier letter forms.

- **Gold:** Gold leaf makes the manuscript truly illuminated. Using the moisture of breath imparted through a bamboo tube, the artist activates the glue binding agent in gesso until it bonds with the gold leaf. Burnishing tools and brushes finish the gilded image.

Quick Facts

- It took 6 calligraphers or scribes 7 years to complete the 1,127 pages. Each page took between 7-13 hours to create.

- The pages of *The Saint John's Bible* are made of calfskin vellum. Each piece of vellum holds four pages.

- Six artists created the 160 major illuminations.
This project took 15 years to complete (1995-2011). On May 9, 2011 the last words were written.

The text is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

God is represented in gold.

It is the first hand written, illuminated bible in over 500 years.

The original bible is at Saint John’s University in Collegeville, MN.

*The Saint John’s Bible* Heritage Edition is approximately 2 feet tall by 3 feet wide when open and weighs between 30-60 pounds.

The Heritage Edition

The Heritage Edition is a full-size reproduction of the original masterpiece which is held at Saint John’s University. No two Heritage Editions are exactly alike as each major illumination is hand treated. The seven volumes include:

1. Pentateuch
2. Historical books
3. Wisdom books
4. Psalms
5. Prophet
6. Gospels and Acts
7. Letters and Revelation

The Heritage Edition of *The Saint John’s Bible* is a fine art reproduction of the original. Its creation has engaged the finest printing experts and binders to ensure faithful representation of the original manuscript. A world-class team of scribes, artists, and craftspeople have guided its development from the ink first touching the vellum to the creation of the Heritage Edition—each of which brilliantly maintains the awe-inspiring artistic intent of the original. Each of the 1,150 pages and 160 illuminations has been scrupulously compared to its original counterpart to guarantee accurate reproduction.

Monadnock Paper Mills, a family-owned paper mill in Bennington, New Hampshire, and the oldest continuously operating paper mill in the United States, is supplying the paper for the Heritage Edition of *The Saint John’s Bible*. It is custom-made of 100 percent cotton with no artificial whiteners or brighteners, coatings or fillers. This archival paper will last for generations.

The Heritage Edition’s fidelity with the beauty of the original masterpiece is achieved through multiple techniques.

**Inks**: Fade-resistant, permanent ink is applied through a special printing technique using ultraviolet light. The depth of the images is a testament to the quality of this process.

**Foils**: Gold and silver foils are applied to the illuminations to capture the stunning effect of gold and platinum leaf in the original. In ancient manuscripts, it’s the presence of gold that qualifies a manuscript as truly “illuminated.”

**Translucent Effect**: The translucent vellum pages of the original make “show-through” an integral part of the artwork. This is recreated on the cotton pages by printing—in reverse—a light watermark of the adjacent page.

The search for printing vendors for the Heritage Edition began in 2004. Options were explored in England, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, but ultimately it was three companies in Minnesota who were contracted to do the work. John Roberts Company in Minnesota had been working with color management techniques in digital-to-print technologies and invested in a rare, high-tech Heidelberg XL-105 press. They already had partnerships with ColorMax of Paynesville, just 20 miles from Saint John’s University that initiated the digital imaging of the original
pages. Since then the imaging has moved in-house to the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. Finally, McIntosh Embossing in Minneapolis provide the silver and gold embellishments.

Each volume of the Heritage Edition goes through a rigorous process of color correcting and press checks at every stage. Donald Jackson oversees production, aided by international printing consultant, John Parfitt, Donald Jackson’s studio manager and Sarah Harris.

The volumes are bound in rich, handcrafted, embossed red leather. The spines are imprinted with the volume title and number in gold foil. Each volume is finished with an ornamental silver clasp. The binding is hand stitched by a lady in Pakistan.