The SJB is the first illuminated, hand-written Bible of monumental size to be made in over 500 years.

Donald Jackson who lives in Monmouth, Wales is the artistic director, chief calligrapher/graphic artist, and main proponent of the entire SJB project. He is one of the world’s foremost calligraphers and holds the title “Senior Illuminator to the Queen of England’s Crown Office.”

For a number of years beginning in the 1980s, Jackson led a calligraphy conference held at St. John’s University. The idea of creating the SJB grew out of this long-standing relationship between Jackson and St. John’s University; the synergy between Jackson and St. John’s made the project possible.

The project was conceived by Jackson as a fulfillment of a life-long dream and sponsored by the Benedictine Abbey of St. John the Baptist/Saint John’s University in Collegeville, MN, for which the manuscript is named. The sponsorship of the project by a Benedictine Abbey carries on the tradition of the Benedictines who sponsored many of the great illuminated manuscripts created in the ages prior to the advent of the printing press.

The deliberation about whether or not to undertake the SJB took over three years, from 1995 until the end of 1998. In the end, the project was authorized by a vote of the brothers at St. John’s Abbey. It received the enthusiastic support of then president of SJU, Dietrich Reinhart (died 2008). A number of the Benedictine brothers assisted in the project in various ways.

Work commenced at the beginning of 1999, and in 2011 the final ink was placed on the last volume produced. The SJB was twelve years in the making.

The cost of the project was approximately $8 million.

The original SJB consists of seven volumes totaling 1,150 pages. The pages are made of vellum (a finely prepared leather) and each volume is bound in beautifully tooled leather covers. When opened, the manuscript is 2’ high by 3’ wide.

There is only one original SJB, and it will be housed permanently at the Benedictine Abbey of St. John. But a limited number of fine art copies were produced under Jackson’s careful supervision.

The Heritage Edition of the SJB is an art reproduction of the original made in the same size format. It is printed on thick pages of cotton fiber using a sophisticated process involving ink that was quick dried by ultraviolet light. This process produced a depth of color and tactile quality that communicates something of the beauty and heft of the original SJB’s vellum pages.
• Only 299 copies of the SJB were produced for acquisition; another 60 or so copies were produced as gifts to major donors. The 299 sets are a limited edition; it is highly unlikely that further sets will ever be produced, certainly none will ever again be made under the close and careful supervision of Donald Jackson.

• The illuminations in the Heritage Edition contain real gold leaf to replicate as closely as possible the luster of the original. The gold leaf applied to the illuminations in each of the 299 volumes received special hand treatment to ensure that the illuminations replicate the splendor of the original. Thus no two copies of the Heritage Edition are exactly the same; each is, to some extent, a unique work of art. The tooling of the calfskin covers is also hand done and unique to each set. All sets are serialized and signed.

• The seven volumes of the Heritage Edition together weigh 114 pounds.

• The Heritage Edition may be viewed at Wartburg College’s Waldemar Schmit Art Gallery from January 10th until February 21st. After February, the Pentateuch and the Gospels/Acts volumes will remain on display throughout 2014 in the college’s Vogel Library.

• More information about the exhibit may be obtained by navigating to the Wartburg College website for this project (www.wartburg.edu/bible).