

# *Illuminating the Word*

THE ST. JOHN'S BIBLE



*Discover a spectacular handwritten,  
illuminated Bible that's a contemporary  
masterpiece of medieval craftsmanship.*

***The Saint John's Bible*** is the first completely handwritten and [illuminated Bible](#) to have been commissioned by a Benedictine Abbey since the invention of the printing press.

Sacred Scripture and Benedictines are inseparable. Called to pray at critical points during the day, a monk centers his life on the Liturgy of the Hours, a set pattern of prayer composed of Psalms, biblical readings, and hymns. It should be no wonder that when the community of Saint John's Abbey was looking for a way to mark the turn of the millennium, the Bible in some way should play a role.

*The Saint John's Bible* is divided into seven volumes and is two feet tall by three feet wide when open. The Bible is made of [vellum](#), with 160 illuminations, and according to Abbot John Klassen has cost an estimated \$8 million to produce. The version of the Bible used is the [New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition](#) (NRSV-CE).

In 1996, the Queen of England's calligrapher and longtime friend of the abbey, Donald Jackson, suggested to Fr. Eric Hollas that Saint John's should sponsor him to complete a handwritten Bible using parchment and quill.

The creators of *The Saint John's Bible* use a mixture of techniques used in the creation of ancient [illuminated manuscripts](#) (handwritten with quills on [calf-skin vellum](#), gold and platinum leaf and hand-ground [pigments](#), Chinese stick ink, and modern technology: computers used to plan the layout of the Bible, and line-breaks for the text).

"The illuminations are not illustrations. They are spiritual meditations on a text." It is a very Benedictine approach to Scriptures.

During production, a team of scholars and theologians gathered weekly to develop the theological content behind the illuminations. This included not only developing the schema for the illuminations (i.e., which passages would be illuminated), but also identifying underlying themes and elements for the artists to incorporate.

Following are links to two videos that provide an in-depth look at the monumental amount of work and the uniquely talented individuals who produced this masterpiece.



<http://bit.ly/KkmNCz>

This video narrated by Fr. Hollas and Donald Jackson is a fascinating overview of the entire project.



<http://bit.ly/1eISq2>

This video was Donald Jackson's appearance/ interview on the Today Show. You'll learn different aspects of Donald's life and a number of other very interesting facts about the project.