

Interview continued: The Year of the Bible and the St. John's Bible at St. John's Church, Tallahassee

4. *The St John's Bible* is said to be a combination of ancient and modern techniques. It is hand-written with turkey, goose, and swan quills on calf-skin vellum, yet computers were used to plan the layout of the volumes. How does it 'feel', i.e., does it strike you as either 'really old' or 'really contemporary' or some mixture of the two? What first struck you personally about this Bible in your first encounter with it?

KK: It is truly incredible. I think it feels both old AND new at the same time. The illuminations are so exquisite with gorgeous colors, and the blend of ancient and modern symbols and patterns captures the imagination, drawing you closer to God. The gold leaf used throughout to represent the Divine reflects light and the faces of viewers making the Bible come to life.

LM: We had the privilege of seeing and touching the original *Saint John's Bible* at St. John's University and I have to say, it felt very old. I remember turning the vellum pages and seeing the gilded illuminations and thinking I was handling a medieval manuscript. We were in the university library's vault and it felt like we were in the bowels of a monastery. The Heritage Edition's pages feel very similar to the vellum used for the original and the illuminations are just as vibrant. It's an interesting sensation you experience when you look at the pages covered in medieval-looking script with illuminations that reveal contemporary depictions of old Bible stories. People are fascinated when they discover Bible story illuminations that incorporate images such as the World Trade Center's Twin Towers, the AIDS virus, and a view of the Earth inspired by the Apollo 8 mission's photograph.

5. The 160 illustrations are described on the Bible's official website as 'a contemporary blending of religious imagery from various Eastern and Western traditions, as befits our modern understanding of the global village'. What would you tell us about the illustrations? How do they strike you?

KK: The illuminations are my favorite part of the *Saint John's Bible* and inviting others in to practice *Visio Divina*, or "sacred seeing" is contagious! We have trained over 40 volunteer docents, and the artwork seems to be a crowd favorite!

LM: The Bible's size and its unique script certainly attract people, but it's the illuminations that get them to stay with the Bible for hours. Everyone gathers around the Bible and they start talking about what they see and what they think the image means. The art is the leveler. You don't need any sort of biblical expertise to appreciate and contribute. It invites people who might not be familiar with scripture into a conversation about the meaning of a passage. It's amazing to watch. You just open the Bible and let God interact with His people.

6. What have been some of the reactions and responses in the church to this special volume of the Gospels and the Book of Acts? What do you hear people saying? How have people responded to the 'Year of the Bible' as a theme for the whole parish to embrace? How does that theme reach various groups in the church, e.g., children in Sunday School, Bible study groups or other gatherings? Are people reading the Bible more?

KK: I've seen jaws drop with many eyes wide and teary. Phones immediately come out to take pictures, young and old alike! Here at St. John's, we are undertaking a "Year of the Bible" all program-year long! We began with Miqra, a public reading of the entire Bible over the course of 72 consecutive hours. Parishioners of all ages took turns reading aloud for one hour seated on the Compass Rose in front of our altar. Together, we are reading the Bible all yearlong replacing the lectionary with selected readings from every book of the Bible, and our Sunday School classes are following along with weekly lessons and conversations. Many are reading *The Story*, an abridged version of the Bible, while others are reading their Bibles. (You can read about Miqra and our Year of the Bible program year here: <https://www.saint-john.org/st-johns-launches-year-of-the-bible-with-72-hour-public-reading/>).

LM: The *Saint John's Bible* adds a communal dimension to our "Year of the Bible" that individual copies of scripture alone cannot provide. It complements our Bible readings by providing a visual aspect that adds depth. We can incorporate the Bible into activities that engage the wider church such as art classes, calligraphy classes, illumination discussions, and classes about ancient Bible making methods. Bringing people into the Bible visually gets them motivated to read scripture. It keeps our "Year of the Bible" fresh and renewed and it engages the congregation in a variety of ways.

7. How about the community at large? Have you been able to share this wonderful loan of a volume of *The St John's Bible* with other churches or groups in the Tallahassee community?

KK: We have an incredibly dedicated and generous team of volunteer docents who help us to share the story of the Saint John's Bible within our walls and in the surrounding community. Anyone in the community is invited to request time with the Saint John's Bible (you can find more information about our process here: <https://www.saint-john.org/sjbible/>) We've had requests from schools, churches, and civic organizations and are reaching out to the University and Senior communities in early 2024. We plan to take it to the Capitol on Ash Wednesday, Word of [South], a local festival of Literature and music scheduled in April, to Grace Mission, the prison, and the hospital. The Good News is for everyone!

LM: As I said previously, sharing the *Saint John's Bible* with our sister church, St. Michael and All Angels, has been my favorite experience with the *Saint John's Bible* so far. We have it scheduled for loan to Advent Episcopal Church this month and St. John's Episcopal Church in Bainbridge, Georgia has scheduled it for early next year. The Bible has been to a presentation at Holy Comforter Episcopal School where hundreds of children saw it and it's been taken to an individual who was homebound. We've shared it with office groups, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, church circles, and the Rotary Club has requested it. I'm

sure 2024 will find us bringing the *Saint John's Bible* to numerous places and sharing it with all kinds of groups and people. Our docents are extremely dedicated, and I think they feel the way I do about sharing the Bible. That is, we experience the same blessing as the people who view the Bible when we share God's Word.