

The **FM**
Extra

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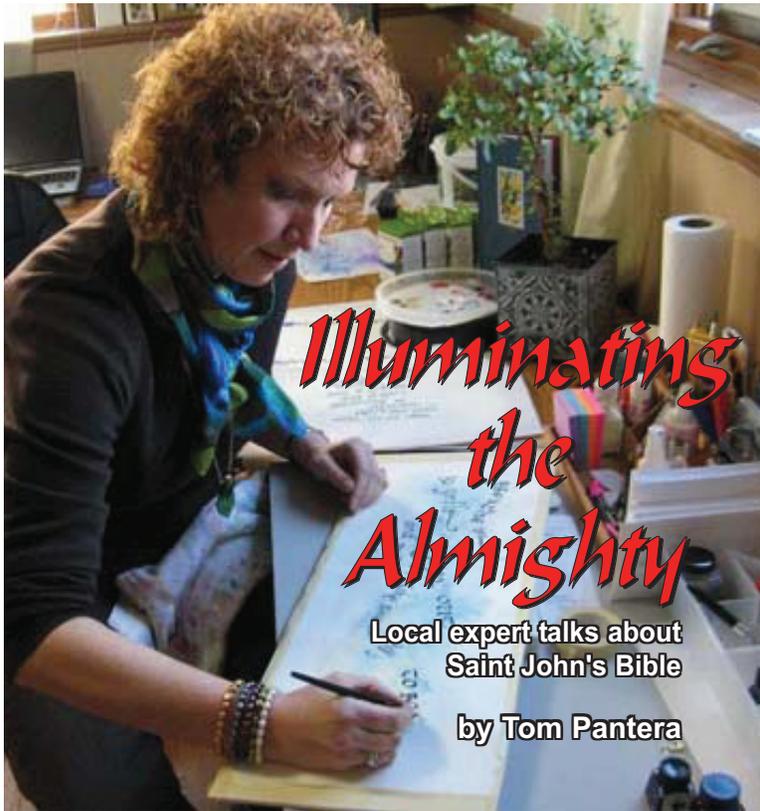
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Illuminating the Almighty

Local expert talks about
Saint John's Bible

by Tom Pantera

Anne Kaese laughingly agrees that she is a "Saint John's Bible groupie."

As a calligrapher, there's a little bit of envy in her voice when she talks about the ongoing project. She isn't involved in the production of the Bible, but "I wish I was," she says ruefully.

But if she can't put quill to vellum, she can help other people appreciate it. "My involvement is (as an) ardent admirer and doing the public education in the Fargo-Moorhead area," she says. The Bible, she says, is "the coolest project that people can do in modern times."

Prints of pages from the Saint John's Bible are on display at the Heritage Hjemkomst Center until Dec. 27. During that time, Kaese, of Fargo, will be giving numerous presentations on the work, which she has been a devotee of since before the actual calligraphy on the illuminated work began.

She first heard about the project in 1998, when Saint John's Abbey and University in Collegeville, Minn., first announced the project. Then living in Minneapolis, Kaese got a postcard inviting her to the public launch of the project, when Saint John's officials were trying to gauge what public response to the project would be – and how to fund its projected \$4.5 million cost.

The Bible actually was the brainchild of Donald Jackson, official calligrapher to Queen Elizabeth. "For calligraphers, doing a hand-written Bible is like the Sistine Chapel," Kaese explains. Jackson approached Saint John's because he was familiar with the organization's commitment to sharing such works; the abbey has a huge library of sacred texts, and the school library, in particular, has worked to share those with others around the world. Jackson didn't want to work years on an illuminated Bible only to see it locked away from public view. And Saint John's had the means of production, preservation and distribution to get the Bible before the public.

Kaese said Jackson's basic concept was to produce a work to both update and popularize how the Bible is viewed.

An illuminated Bible isn't just a Bible illustrated with nice, representational pictures. An illuminated Bible is hand-copied and contains "images with meaning," Kaese says, often partially abstract works that can be open to interpretation. For example, the artwork for the Book of Psalms in the Saint John's version includes representations of digital voiceprints, symbolizing that in prayer "we all have a voice." Depictions of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis are based on Nigerian tribespeople, since scientists believe the earliest humans may have come from just that area.

Most popular images of the Bible are based on 16th-century Renaissance paintings. Those images are highly Eurocentric and "very not what the world is today – blonde guys in long, flowing robes doing stuff," she says.

As a result, the mental images most people carry from the Bible are antiquated, disconnected from the very different reality of the modern world.

The Saint John's Bible updates those images in ways both large and small. A farmer sowing seeds in the field is shown wearing jeans and a work shirt. And an image of the earth is based on photos taken from spacecraft. There are pictorial references to the slave trade, the Holocaust and the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11.

Actual work on the Saint John's Bible began on Ash Wednesday of 2000, but Saint John's was not idle between the 1998 announcement of the project and the inscribing of the first letter.

Saint John's hired seven calligraphers, including Jackson. Some are well-known in calligraphy circles and others have become well-known due to their work on the project. They were chosen carefully, not just for skill but for a willingness to subordinate their egos to the project and not put their own personal stamp on it. The calligraphers even refuse to autograph the copies currently for sale to the public (high-quality books reproducing each of the seven volumes are available at prices starting at about \$65).

The project's organizers also had to figure out exactly how the Bible would look, decide which version of the Bible would be used (it turned out to be the New Revised Standard Version) and even figure out how to procure and prepare the proper materials.

Those materials included actual quills, vellum – calfskin – hand-ground ink and 24-karat gold, not things to be found just anywhere. "You can't just walk into Barnes & Noble and say, 'Can I have a couple hundred quills?'" Kaese says. And the master copy will end up at 1,150 pages and "that's a lot of calfskin."

The Bible is being split into seven volumes, of which six have been completed. Calligraphers began with the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, parts with wide public appeal. Work is under way on the last volume, which will contain Paul's Letters and the Book of Revelation, with the goal to finish by next summer. It takes six to 10 hours to do just the lettering on each page.

The calligraphers' work will be bound into one master copy, from which 100 full-size reproductions will be made. If you want one, though, better save your shekels; each reproduction will sell for \$145,000 per set. Reproductions already have been given to the Pope, the Mayo Clinic, St. Martin's of the Field in London and the Benedictine Convent in Crookston, Minn.

As a calligrapher herself, Kaese is a huge admirer of the technical skill and the spiritual devotion that are going into the work.

"It is such a monumental mental and physical project," she says. "You have to learn a style of writing and reproduce it faithfully. The discipline, the concentration, the dedication – it becomes an act of worship."

"By the time you finish this, you know each and every word. It becomes part of you. It really is an act of meditation, an act of giving, to produce this."

– continued on page 13

The Savvy Senior (cont'd)

tingling or numbness in the hands and feet) usually seem harmless, and often don't appear for years until significant damage to the blood vessels has already occurred. That's why beginning at age 45, everyone should be tested for diabetes every three years. And you should get tested annually if you have any of the previously listed factors that put you at risk.

The Tests

There are several tests your doctor can give you to determine whether you have diabetes including the "fasting blood glucose test" or the "oral glucose tolerance test," that require an eight hour fast before you take it. And the "hemoglobin A1C test" or "random blood glucose test," that can be taken any time regardless of when you ate.

If you're reluctant to visit your doctor to get tested, an alternative is to test yourself. To do that, go to your pharmacy and buy a blood glucose monitor (many of them cost under \$20). Fast overnight, and check your blood sugar in the morning. If your result is less than 100, you're OK. But if your blood glucose is 100 to 125, then you have prediabetes. And if your reading is higher than 125, you may have diabetes. If your reading is above 100, you need to visit your doctor to develop a plan to get it under control. In many cases lifestyle changes like losing weight, exercising, eating a healthy diet and cutting back on carbohydrates may be all you need to do to get your diabetes under control. For others who need more help, many medications are available.

Savvy Tips: Medicare provides free diabetes screenings to seniors with increased risk factors - see Medicare.gov or call 800-633-4227 to learn more. And for more information including dozens of free publications on all aspects of diabetes visit the National Diabetes Education Program at www.ndep.nih.gov, or call 888-693-6337.

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit www.savvysenior.org. Jim Miller is a regular contributor to the NBC Today Show and author of "The Savvy Senior" book.



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Illuminating the Almighty continued from page 5

It's also an act of creative problem-solving. Mistakes in the calligraphy can be corrected. Because the work is being done on calfskin, misshapen letters can be scraped off, the hide reconditioned and the mistake corrected.

But even larger mistakes have been corrected, albeit with more than a little creativity. On one page, the calligrapher left out a verse. That verse was put at the bottom of the page, then illuminated with a pulley - based on a Leonardo da Vinci design - being operated by a bumblebee. The pulley is depicted as moving the verse into its proper place.

Kaese says such touches "give the Bible a humanity, and it reminds us that perfection is not possible."

More than most, Kaese can appreciate the technical aspects of the work.

She first took up calligraphy, literally "the art of beautiful writing," at 12 in her native South Africa. Her mother, a lay leader in their church, needed some confirmation certificates done; recognizing her daughter's artistic bent, she drafted young Anne.

She began serious study of the art in her late teens. "It fascinated me," she says. "It's almost like building a house with bricks. It's a very lin-

ear, architectural thing for me." And just as bricks can be used to build everything from a simple frame house to the Taj Mahal, the elements of calligraphy can be used to make everything from the plain to the elaborate.

Calligraphy is about structure, form and function, she says. It's different from scripting, in which an artist can use her own style. In calligraphy, "you build letters by strokes," she says. "Good calligraphy follows rules and design, and it's precise and it's elegant."

Such exactitude is part of what makes the painstaking work of creating the Saint John's Bible as much an act of worship as an art, she says. And if its creation feeds the soul, so does just viewing it.

"The more you learn about the Saint John's Bible, the more you want to get involved in it," she says. "Any time your faith is represented in a new way, it gets exciting. It gives me a new way of looking at my faith, something that is current."