

Abhishekam for Sri Venkateswara (Balaji)

Goaplachary Lakshmanan

Abhishekam (THIRUMANJANAM in Sri Vaishnava parlance) is performed for Sri Venkateswara (Balaji) every Saturday morning at 10:30 AM at the Bridgewater temple. Veda mantras (SikshAvalli, Sri SUktham, Purusha SUktham and NeerAttam from NalAyira Divya Pirabhandham) are chanted as the priests pour the five essential ingredients over the vigraha. By performing Abhishekam, we try to please HIM (for our joy) by pouring cool liquids and anoint HIM with sweet smelling powders.

In Thirupathi, Andhra Pradesh, India, Abhishekam is performed for Sri Venkateswara every Friday morning. The water for the Abhishekam (sacred bath for Perumal) is brought from Akasaganga, a water reservoir several miles from the temple by the descendants of Thirumalai Nambi, a well-known Vaishnavite Saint, who lived a few centuries back.

PREPARATIONS: Prior to the start of the Abhishekam proceedings, all decorations from previous week's Alankaram on Perumal are removed. HE is decorated only with a yellow piece of cloth deftly wrapped around HIS waist in panchakacham fashion. Oil is rubbed gently on HIS face and other limbs. To have DARSHAN of HIM in this Alankaram with no more than a piece of cloth and no ornaments is itself a Great Blessing! HE shines and bestows HIS smile with such GRACE as if to beckon all of us saying: Please come, my children. I am ready to accept your offerings.

ABHISHEKAM: Purvanga Puja to Vishvaksenar is done by the priest. With chanting of veda mantras "shanno mitra sham varuNa:" priests and the devotees go around the sannidhi with the offerings (milk, curd, honey and on some days if some devotee has sponsored with new vastrams for Perumal) in hand. After this sankalpam is done by the priests for those who are sponsoring the abhishekam. Priests and other devotees recite SikshAvalli from Taittiriya Upanishad pouring water, milk, and curds on HIS THIRUMENI. Sri SUktham is recited to adore Goddess Lakshmi and ANDAL seated on HIS Thirumarbu. While reciting Sri SUktham, a mixture of turmeric and sandal water is poured. Then NeerAttam is sung in praise of the GOD. NeerAttam in Tamil means to 'give bath'. Periaazhvaar, one of the twelve aazhvaars has sung several verses imagining HIM as BALA KRISHNAN who is playful and gives a hard time to Yasodha when she calls him to take HIS bath. She cajoles HIM with sweets and other foods and pleads with HIM to take HIS bath. Periaazhvaar praises HIM, HIS valor and heroic deeds HE performed in his avataras as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna in these ten verses. The Abhishekam concludes with recitation of Purusha Suktham. This speaks about how HE created the world and its inhabitants including the human species and seeks all blessings from HIM.

One reason for performing the Abhishekam: We are giving back to Perumal as a token of gratitude what HE has bestowed upon us due to his Soursilyam. We use only naturally occurring substances for this. The five things used are: milk, curds, honey mixed with fruits, turmeric and sandal powders.

ALANKARAM: After the Abhishekam, Alankaram is done for Perumal with silk saris, flowers and ornaments. When the priests are busy decorating HIM behind closed curtains, we recite Sri Vishnu SahasraNama (the thousand names of Vishnu as revealed by Sri Bhisma to Yudhistira in the presence of Sri Krishna) and Sri Lakshmi Ashtottara satha nama sthotram. Songs are sung by individuals in HIS glory and we sing bhajans collectively in HIS praise.

ARATI AND MANGALAM: We conclude the ritual by doing Archana, Sattrumurai and MangalAsasanam for HIM and Sri Devi and Bhu Devi who are seated on either side of HIS chest. This is the final phase of the ritual and the most awaited moment of the day. Everyone present drinks in the Divine Grace flowing freely from HIM without any distinction and equally to ALL. All bhakthas are enthralled by HIM. Archana is performed. Sattrumurai pAsurams (from Divya Pirabhandham - saying we surrender to HIM) are chanted. Arati is shown. MangalAasasanam is done and the Abhishekam is concluded with distribution of prasadam.

This is one of the important functions taking place in the temple every Saturday at 10:30 a.m. All Bhakthas are welcome to participate in this significant event and receive the Blessings of Srinivasar.