Karthika Masam & Karthika Purnima

Spiritual Significance, Sacred Rituals, Temple Celebrations & Puranic Legends



Offering sacred lamps (Deeparadhana) beneath the radiant full moon of Karthika Purnima

1. The Significance of Karthika Masam & Purnima

> ***"Kārtikyādiṣu saṃyoge kṛttikādi dvayaṃ dvayam \| Antyopāntyo pañcamaśca tridhā māsatrayaṃ smṛtam \|\|" — (Surya Siddhanta)***
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> Astronomical rule defining the lunar months starting with Karthika based on the conjunction of the full moon with the Krittika and subsequent nakshatras.

"There is no month equal to Karthika. There is no deity equal to Lord Vishnu. There is no sacred river or pilgrimage equal to the Ganga," states the Puranas. Devotees believe that Karthika Masam (Karthika Masam 2026), renowned for spiritual discipline (*sadhana*), is exceedingly sacred and glorious. It is revered as a month especially dear to both Lord Shiva and Lord Keshava (Vishnu). When the Purnima (full moon) tithi aligns with the Krittika nakshatra, it forms the Karthika month.

This year, Karthika Purnima falls on **November 24 (Tuesday)**.

During this Purnima, the Moon is very close to the Earth. The Moon is the presiding deity of the mind (*Manah Karaka*). Because abundant moonbeams fall upon the Earth and water, the mind becomes peaceful and serene. Among all the sacred baths taken throughout the year, the *Karthika Snanam* (bath during Karthika) is uniquely special. Scriptures state that the rituals performed on Karthika Purnima bestow immense spiritual merit (*punya*).



Families and children lighting lamps together during Karthika Purnima

2. Sacred Rituals, Worship & Traditions

> ***"Kārtikyāṃ kṛttikā yoge yaḥ kuryāt svāmi darśanam | Saptajanma bhaved vipro dhanāḍhyo vedapāragaḥ ||"***
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> One who has the darshan of the Lord during the conjunction of Krittika in the month of Karthika becomes learned, prosperous, and a master of the Vedas across seven lifetimes.

Those who have divine darshan, offer lamps (*Deepadanam*), take sacred baths (*Snanam*), and perform mantra recitation (*Japam*) when Krittika nakshatra aligns on Karthika Purnima attain tremendous spiritual merit. Taking a holy dip on this Purnima in sacred rivers like the Ganga, Godavari, Krishna, Tungabhadra, or any nearby sacred water body brings great merit. Those unable to bathe in a river may bathe at home using water mixed with *Gangajal* (Ganga water). Lighting an *Akashadeepam* (sky lamp) in the evening is a special custom.

Scriptures describe donating a *Salagrama* (sacred stone) and *Usirikaya* (Indian gooseberries/amla) on this day as supremely sacred. Additionally, lighting lamps at temples and near the Tulasi plant at home is highly auspicious. Lighting a lamp with **365 wicks**—symbolizing the 365 days of the year—is a distinctive tradition.

According to the scriptural saying *"Kārtike tu kṛtā dīkṣā nṝṇāṃ janmavimocanī,"* undertaking spiritual vows (*Deeksha*) during Karthika Masam grants liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Cooking and eating *Paramannam* (sweet rice pudding) under the moonlight on Karthika Purnima night is also a traditional custom. On Karthika Purnima, one should remember Lord Kartikeya, the commander of the celestial armies, for victory over enemies. At moonrise, the six Krittikas (Pleiades) who protected and nurtured Kartikeya should be worshiped in the form of sacred fire. Karthika Masam is deeply beloved by both Shiva and Keshava, and the Puranas state that Sri Maha Vishnu awakens from His cosmic sleep (*Yoga Nidra*) on *Karthika Shuddha Ekadashi*.



Devotees witnessing and passing beneath the sacred Jwalatoranam during Karthika Purnima

3. Grand Celebrations Across Sacred Temples

The full moon day in this month, when the sky sparkles with bright stars, holds boundless glory. In **Kashi (Varanasi)**, this day is celebrated with great grandeur as **"Dev Deepavali."** That night, the entire banks of the Ganga look breathtakingly beautiful, illuminated by thousands of glowing lamps. It is believed there that the celestial gods themselves descend to Earth to offer lamp worship (*Deeparadhana*).

At **Arunachalam (Tiruvannamalai)**, the renowned temple among the Panchabhoota Lingas, the **"Krittika Deepam"** is lit on this day. At the **Dakshinamnaya Sringeri Sharada Peetham**, the *Laksha Deepotsavam* (festival of a hundred thousand lamps) is celebrated with immense splendor on Karthika Purnima. Furthermore, the Jagadgurus specially perform the *Tunga Harati* from Karthika Shuddha Ekadashi through Karthika Purnima.



Illuminated river ghats and evening Aarti during Dev Deepavali on Karthika Purnima

4. The Legends & Significance of Jwalatoranam

Jwalatoranam: Alongside sacred baths, charity, and lighting lamps on this day, **"Jwalatoranam"** is a festival that bestows infinite spiritual merit merely by witnessing it. On the evening of Karthika Purnima, this special celebration takes place in the courtyard of every Shiva temple. Two tall poles are erected in front of the temple, and another pole is tied horizontally across them. Dry grass is wrapped around the horizontal pole and set ablaze, appearing as a radiant, flaming archway (*Torana Shivalingam*). Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati are carried in a palanquin beneath this sacred flaming arch, after which devotees walk beneath the Jwalatoranam praying for the removal of all afflictions, flaws, and sins in their lives.

The Slaying of Tripurasuras

In ancient times, this was the very day Lord Paramashiva vanquished the three demons known as the *Tripurasuras*, earning this full moon the name **Tripura Purnima**. When her husband returned to Mount Kailasa after destroying the wicked demons, Goddess Parvati, the Universal Mother, was concerned that the evil eye (*Drishti Dosham*) might affect him and arranged this *Jwalatoranam* to ward off that negative gaze. To commemorate Lord Shiva's victory over Tripurasura, a lamp with 365 wicks is lit near the Tulasi plant.

Lord Shiva Consuming the Halahala Poison

When the Ocean of Milk (*Kshira Sagara*) was churned, a terrifying poison named *Halahala* (*Kalakuta Visham*), capable of destroying the universe, emerged. Terrified, both gods and demons rushed to Lord Paramashiva for refuge. For the welfare of the world, Lord Shiva accepted the poison and held it in His throat without swallowing it, becoming known as *Garala Kanthudu* or *Neelakanthudu* (the blue-throated one). Following this event, Goddess Parvati, Lord Shiva, and their family passed beneath the *Jwalatoranam* three times. Placing the leftover burnt grass from this archway into cattle feed and grain storage areas is believed to bring prosperity and abundance in livestock and harvest.

Liberation from the Gates of Hell (Naraka Dvaram)

Scriptures explain that witnessing the *Jwalatoranam* and passing beneath it destroys all sins, bestows good health, and wards off untimely death. In particular, the Puranas state that walking beneath it prevents entry through the gates of hell.

5. The Significance of Deepadanam (Offering Lamps)

Deepadanam: Fasting on Karthika Purnima and lighting a lamp at a temple or at home yields extraordinary spiritual rewards. Everyone should be sure to light at least one lamp and recite the following shloka:

> ***"Kīṭāḥ pataṅgāḥ maśakāśca vṛkṣāḥ \| Jale sthale ye nivasanti jīvāḥ \|***
> ***Dṛṣṭvā pradīpaṃ na hi janmabhāginaḥ \| Bhavanti tvaṃ śvapacā hi viprāḥ \|\|"***

By the sacred influence of lighting this lamp, we pray that all living beings—insects, birds, mosquitoes, trees, plants, aquatic creatures, and amphibians, regardless of the form they inhabit—attain liberation (*moksha*) in those very forms and be freed from rebirth. As human beings, we have the opportunity to gain wisdom and attain liberation through the path shown by the Vedas, whereas other living beings do not. It is our sacred duty (*dharma*) to repay the creatures in nature that support us by lighting a lamp and reciting this prayer for their liberation.

> **Core Essence of Karthika Purnima:** "Light is life; ignorance is darkness." Lighting a lamp is not merely a ritualistic formality; it is a profound spiritual message teaching us to dispel the inner darkness of ego, hatred, and jealousy, and to spread the light of love, wisdom, and virtue throughout the entire world.