

MESSENGER Spacecraft Flies by Mercury

September 30 2009



Artist's concept of the NASA's MESSENGER spacecraft at Mercury. Credit: NASA

Shortly before 5:55 p.m. EDT, MESSENGER skimmed 228 kilometers (141 miles) above the surface of Mercury in its third and final flyby of the planet.

Radio signals received after the spacecraft emerged from behind the planet indicate that the spacecraft is operating nominally. Its instruments are now collecting images and other scientific measurements from the planet as it departs Mercury.

Tonight at 9:34 p.m., the spacecraft will turn its high-gain antenna back toward Earth to start down linking real-time telemetry. Downlink of the

data stored onboard will start two hours later. The first images from the [flyby](#) will be released around 10:00 a.m. on September 30, 2009.

MESSENGER (MErcury Surface, Space ENvironment, GEOchemistry, and Ranging) is a NASA-sponsored scientific investigation of the [planet Mercury](#) and the first space mission designed to orbit the planet closest to the Sun.

The MESSENGER [spacecraft](#) launched on August 3, 2004, and after flybys of Earth, Venus, and Mercury will start a yearlong study of its target planet in March 2011.

Provided by JPL/NASA ([news](#) : [web](#))

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