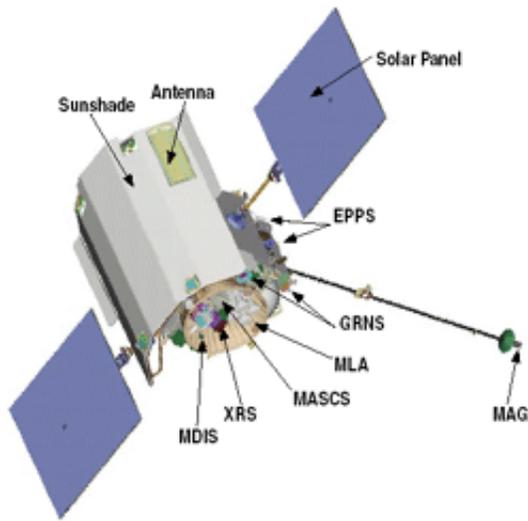


NASA rescheduled MESSENGER start to Mercury to August 3

August 2 2004



Today's launch of the MESSENGER spacecraft has been canceled due to weather constraints. The launch team will try again tomorrow, August 3, at 2:15:56 a.m. MESSENGER is a scientific investigation of the planet Mercury. Understanding Mercury, and the forces that have shaped it, is fundamental to understanding the terrestrial planets and their evolution. Just what is a terrestrial planet? It is a group of planets that are like Earth.

The MESSENGER spacecraft will orbit Mercury following three flybys of that planet. The orbital phase will use the flyby information as an

initial guide to perform a focused scientific investigation of this mysterious world.

MESSENGER will enter Mercury orbit in March 2011 and carry out comprehensive measurements for one Earth year. The data-collection phase of the mission will conclude in March 2012.

Mission Overview

MESSENGER is a scientific investigation of the planet Mercury. Understanding Mercury, and the forces that have shaped it, is fundamental to understanding the terrestrial planets and their evolution.

MESSENGER is a MErcury Surface, Space ENvironment, GEOchemistry, and Ranging mission to orbit Mercury following three flybys of that planet. The orbital phase will use the flyby data as an initial guide to perform a focused scientific investigation of this enigmatic world.

MESSENGER will investigate key scientific questions regarding Mercury's characteristics and environment during these two complementary mission phases. Data are provided by an optimized set of miniaturized space instruments and the spacecraft telecommunications system.

MESSENGER will enter Mercury orbit in March 2011 and carry out comprehensive measurements for one Earth year. Orbital data collection concludes in March 2012.

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