



Credit: NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Carnegie Institution of Washington

## MESSENGER at Mercury

Artist's impression of the **ME**rcury **S**urface, **S**pace **EN**vironment, **GE**ochemistry, and **R**anging (MESSENGER) spacecraft in orbit at Mercury. MESSENGER launched from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla., on Aug. 3, 2004, and will begin a yearlong orbital study of Mercury in March 2011.

Though the Sun is up to 11 times brighter at Mercury than we see on Earth and surface temperatures can reach 450 degrees Celsius (about 840 degrees Fahrenheit), MESSENGER's instruments will operate at room temperature behind a sunshade of heat-resistant ceramic fabric. The spacecraft will also pass only briefly over the hottest parts of the surface, limiting exposure to heat reradiated from the planet.