

# THE SKY THIS MONTH

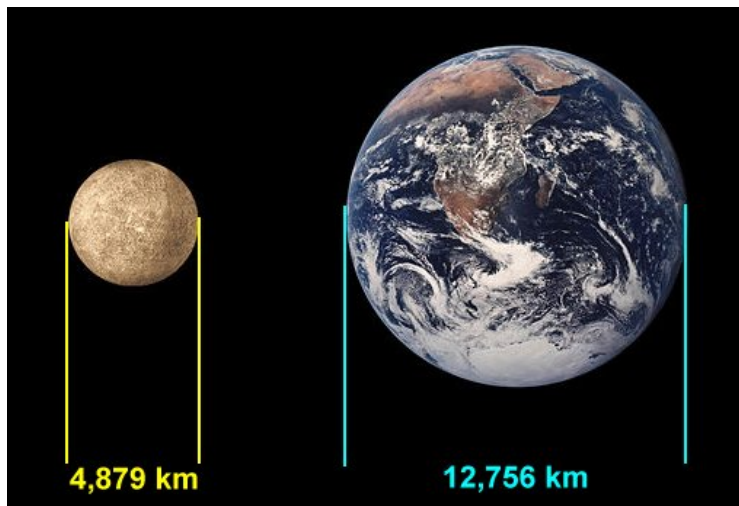
**MAY 2008**

## **MERCURY'S QUICK! CATCH IT WHILE YOU CAN!**

This May, you will get a chance to see a planet that many astronomers easily miss! Mercury, the Solar System's innermost planet, is just two fifths our distance from the Sun. From our viewpoint on Earth, Mercury often gets lost in the Sun's glare. However, Mercury can be seen to escape the twilight glow for a few weeks each year, making it easier to see with the naked eye!

Why so fast? Mercury takes just 88 Earth days to orbit the Sun! No wonder it was named in honour of the Roman messenger of the gods!

Mercury has no atmosphere, so the Sun bakes the daylight surface to 430 degrees Celsius! At night, heat escapes quickly and chills the surface to minus 170 degrees Celsius!



Mercury's diameter is about one third of the Earth's.

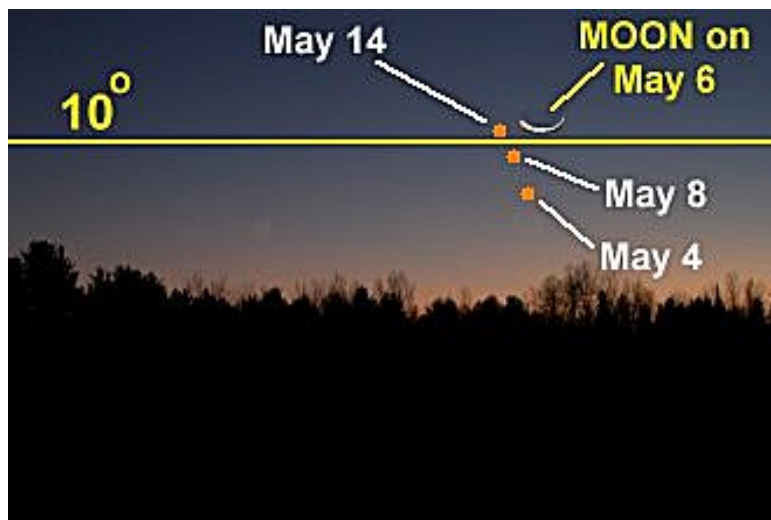
NASA's "Messenger" probe will be collecting unprecedented imagery of this still largely unknown world, beginning on March 18, 2011. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, it briefly flew by Mercury to take initial images of its previously unseen side.



NASA's "Messenger" probe took this image of Mercury during its January 14<sup>th</sup> flyby.

Between 9:00 and 9:30 p.m. of May 4<sup>th</sup> to May 14<sup>th</sup>, you will be able to see Mercury as a white-orange "star", several degrees above your (unobstructed) west-northwestern horizon. A pair of binoculars can certainly help you find it!

On May 6<sup>th</sup>, you will be getting extra help finding Mercury when a very thin 4 percent crescent Moon will be only two degrees above the planet.



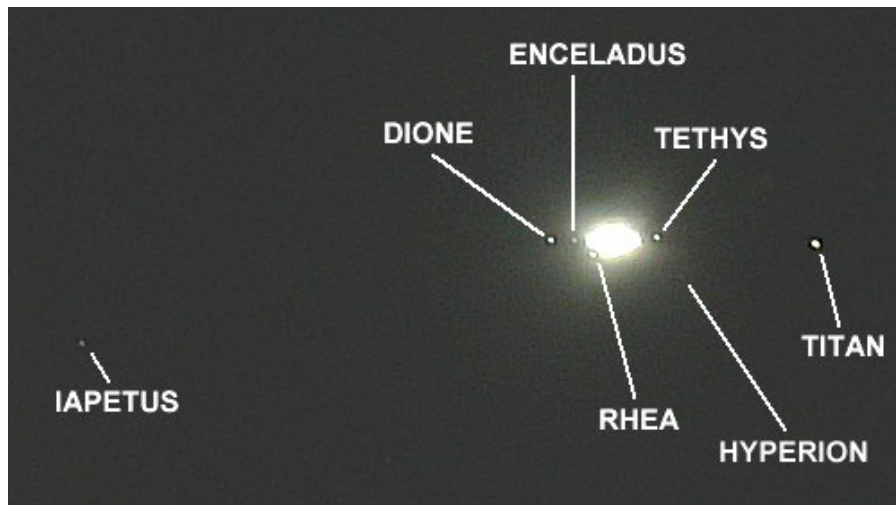
Mercury's locations in your local twilight sky at 9:15 p.m. from May 4<sup>th</sup> to May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

Mercury will disappear into the Sun's glare by May 20<sup>th</sup>, but will reappear in our early dawn skies during the second week of June.

## THE SKY LAST MONTH – APRIL 2008



Saturn as it appeared through the telescope on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Image by the author.



Seven of Saturn's many moons were seen through the telescope on April 15<sup>th</sup>. Clearly seen are Titan, Rhea, Dione, Tethys, Enceladus and far-away Iapetus. Tiny Hyperion can also be seen. Saturn (the large bright elongated blob) had to be greatly overexposed to detect the dimmer moons. Image by the author; 10:30 p.m. EDT April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

## **MAY 10<sup>TH</sup> IS INTERNATIONAL ASTRONOMY DAY!**

The Canada Science and Technology Museum in Ottawa is hosting an all-day event on May 10<sup>th</sup> to celebrate International Astronomy Day. Telescopes of all sizes and shapes will be on hand to look at the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Mars and Saturn (weather permitting)! Inside the museum, there will be interesting astronomy displays and fun activities for everyone.

The author of this article will be at the museum to show you Mercury in broad daylight! You are free to bring along your own telescopic equipment.

All are welcome! Free admission! Join in the fun!

## **THE SKY NEXT MONTH – JUNE 2008**

### **THE SUMMER SKY BEGINS WITH JUPITER!**

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