

NASA'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Over the next year, NASA will celebrate 50 years of scientific and technological excellence. NASA's accomplishments in space exploration, aeronautical technology, and scientific understanding offer significant contributions to modern life. Its technological innovations and scientific discoveries have improved and shaped humanity's existence on Earth. Please join us as we celebrate the past and look forward to a promising new era of inspiration, innovation, and discovery.

1950s

OCTOBER 1, 1958

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) began operation.

1960s

APRIL 1, 1960

TIROS-1, the first successful weather satellite, was launched by NASA from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

MAY 5, 1961

Alan Shepard became the first American to fly in space, on the Freedom 7 suborbital flight from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

MAY 25, 1961

President John F. Kennedy committed the United States to landing on the Moon by the end of the decade.

FEBRUARY 20, 1962

John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth, making three orbits in his Friendship 7 Mercury spacecraft.

AUGUST 22, 1963

The X-15, an experimental rocket plane, set an altitude record of 354,000 feet (67 miles or 108 kilometers).

JULY 28, 1964

The robotic spacecraft Ranger 7 was launched toward the Moon. It photographed the lunar surface before crashing into the Moon on July 31, 1964.

JULY 14, 1965

Mariner 4 flew past Mars, the first U.S. satellite to do so. It transmitted 22 television pictures covering about one percent of Mars' surface. The pictures revealed a vast, barren wasteland of craters strewn about a rust-colored carpet of sand.

JANUARY 27, 1967

During a simulation aboard an Apollo command module on the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center, a flash fire broke out, engulfing the capsule in flames. The three astronauts aboard—Gus Grissom, Ed White, and Roger Chaffee—died of asphyxiation.

OCTOBER 3, 1967

The X-15 rocket plane set a speed record of 4,534 mph (7,297 kilometers per hour).

JULY 20, 1969

Apollo 11 became the first mission to land people on the Moon. Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the Moon while Michael Collins orbited overhead in the Apollo command module.

"The eyes of the world now look into space, to the Moon and to the planets beyond, and we have vowed that we shall not see it governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace. We have vowed that we shall not see space filled with weapons of mass destruction, but with instruments of knowledge and understanding."

John F. Kennedy

1970s

MAY 14, 1973

Skylab, an orbital space platform, was launched. Skylab became home to three crews during 1973–74 for periods of 28, 59, and 84 days, respectively.

JULY 15–24, 1975

At the height of the Cold War, the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project became the first joint international human space flight effort.

AUGUST 20, 1975

Viking 1 was launched from Kennedy Space Center toward Mars. It landed on the red planet on July 20, 1976. Viking 2 was launched to Mars on November 9, 1975, and landed on September 3, 1976.

AUGUST 20, 1977–PRESENT

Voyager 2 was launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida (Voyager 1 was launched on September 5, 1977). Between them, Voyager 1 and 2 explored all the giant outer planets, 48 of their moons, and the systems of rings and magnetic fields that those planets possess.



"The world of space holds vast promise for the service of man, and it is a world we have only begun to explore."

James E. Webb, NASA Administrator 1961-1968

1980s

APRIL 12–14, 1981

Astronauts John Young and Robert Crippen flew aboard Columbia on the first space shuttle flight.

JUNE 18–24, 1983

Sally Ride flew aboard space shuttle Challenger, becoming the first American woman in space.

JANUARY 28, 1986

During the 25th launch of the space shuttle, an explosion occurred 73 seconds into the flight of space shuttle Challenger. All seven of the crew died.

MAY 4, 1989

The Magellan mission to Venus was launched. It arrived at Venus in September 1990 and, using radar, mapped 99 percent of the planet's surface.

OCTOBER 18, 1989

Galileo began a gravity-assisted journey to Jupiter, where it would send a probe into the atmosphere and observe the planet and its satellites for two years beginning in 1995.

1990s

APRIL 4, 1990

Space shuttle Columbia launched the Hubble Space Telescope.

JUNE 27–JULY 7, 1995

Space shuttle Atlantis docked to the Mir space station. It was the first of nine shuttle-Mir link-ups between 1995 and 1998.

JULY 4, 1997

The Mars Pathfinder landed on Mars and deployed the Sojourner rover. This mission marked the first return of the U.S. to Mars after nearly 20 years.

NOVEMBER 20, 1998

The Russian-constructed (and U.S.-financed) spacecraft Zarya lifted off into orbit atop a Russian Proton rocket, becoming the first module of the International Space Station (ISS).

"By pushing beyond the future, by setting for ourselves seemingly impossible challenges, we are transforming our lives for the better here on Earth, even as we explore new worlds in space."

Michael Griffin, NASA Administrator 2005-Present

2000s

OCTOBER 31, 2000

Expedition One of the International Space Station launched from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. Astronaut William M. Shepherd and cosmonauts Yuri Pavolich Gidzenko and Sergi K. Kirkalev became the first residents of the ISS.

FEBRUARY 1, 2003

The space shuttle Columbia broke up in the atmosphere 15 minutes before its scheduled landing. The entire crew perished during reentry.

JANUARY 3 AND 24, 2004

NASA landed two Mars Exploration Rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, on the surface of Mars.

JULY 1, 2004

Following a seven-year journey, Cassini-Huygens became the first spacecraft to go into orbit around Saturn.

JANUARY 14, 2004

President George W. Bush announced the Vision for Space Exploration.

JULY 26, 2005

The space shuttle Discovery lifted off into orbit, marking NASA's return to human spaceflight after the Columbia disaster.

JANUARY 10, 2008

NASA's MESSENGER (Mercury, Surface, Space Environment, Geochemistry and Ranging) probe encountered Mercury.

FEBRUARY 20, 2008

The crew of the space shuttle Atlantis landed safely on Earth after delivering the European Space Agency's Columbus laboratory module to the International Space Station.

The NASA Mission

NASA's mission is to pioneer the future in space exploration, scientific discovery, and aeronautics research.