

Happy Christmas

I wish you a happy Christmas. I am having the day off, but send me thoughts if you wish.

Christmas eve

(Here's one I prepared earlier)

WILL SANTA COME TONIGHT?

"Will Santa come? Will Santa come tonight?"

"He might. He might.

If you are good, he might."

"Can I stay up and see?"

"No. He will not come for you or me

If we do not sleep .

He's too busy to meet us all."

"And will he come for us?"

If you go to sleep – he does not like fuss."

Tonight, by the lights of the tree

There is, at last, some grown up time for me.

The cake is iced

The wine is spiced

The carrots diced.

The pudding's steamed
The brandy butter creamed.
The turkey prepared awaits
And yes, I did clean the plates.
The tree is up, the table laid,
the cards are out , though the credit card's unpaid!

So shall I soon with gifts a plenty
Mount the stairs to deliver twenty?
Do I dare to tread the stair?
And will it creak?
And will it creak?
When can I take a peek?
I need to know if they slumber
Before I arrive with my lumber.

If they are still awake
what dreams will go?
What heart might break?
Or do they know?
And is their belief just all for show?

So tonight by the magic tree
There is need of more time just for me
I will wait – and struggle to keep open my eyes
And wrestle with the morality of eating Santa's mince pies.

My adult mind is full of Christmas chores

The cooking times, and the cards through neighbours' doors
The parties with do not drink and drive in my ears
So the night does not end in tears
Drinks that might have been – but not that cheap red
Which would give me a headache as soon as I got to bed

I was once a child too excited to sleep
with a torrent of thoughts about what I might be given
Hoping that it was a toy beneath the wrapping – should I peep? –
Not more socks or hankies, preferably something to be driven

So could Santa still come for me?
Drowsily I dream as if I were eight
Hoping that Santa would not be late
Like every little boy
There is of course a much wanted toy

So will Santa come tonight?
He might, He might.
If you sleep well
and if you believe

Only if you believe.

And only if in your family
Love fills the hours you will be spending.
It could be the true Santa on the stair
Or it could be someone from an empty chair.

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So will Santa come?

He will. He will.

Good Christmas news for animals

I was delighted to see the government wants to improve the lot of young pets by tightening controls on breeding and selling kittens and puppies.

The government wishes to ensure that all dog breeders are licensed and only sell animals they have bred themselves. They need to keep young dogs and cats with their mothers for at least eight weeks before sale. They plan a better clampdown on smuggling animals, and on breeding pets with genetic problems. The law will be strengthened to offer more protection to the animals.

Like many of my constituents I want to see pets treated well, and to ensure they are bred and sold by decent local businesses that care about them. I have lobbied for higher standards and voted to end the use of tamed wild animals in the circus.

UK growth rate revised up

Once again this week we have seen the UK growth rate revised up, both for 2016 and for 2017. I drew attention to the strange downgrade of 2016 from 2% to 1.8% in the official figures at the time and queried it. Now I see they have put it back up to 1.9% so far. There never was a shred of evidence that the referendum vote led to any loss of output growth in the second half of 2016.

The latest figures for the five years to end 2016 make interesting comparisons. Top of the pack was the USA at 13.1%, followed closely by the UK at 12.7%. Germany was the best of the larger continentals, at 10.8%, followed by France at 6.1% with Italy actually down by 1.8%. In 2016 with half the year after the vote the UK was the top performer of these countries.

The UK this year is likely to finish the year at a higher rate than many forecasts. There have been various reports of how our growth rate is now the slowest of the G7 but this looks likely to be untrue and has definitely been

based on unduly gloomy figures. It is the case as I have pointed out that the tax increases on property and cars have had an adverse impact on sales and activity of these items, the official concerns about diesel cars in particular have depressed sales substantially and the Bank is seeking to reduce consumer and car loans. None of this has anything to do with Brexit.

More money for local hospitals to deal with winter pressures

The government has announced up to £1.71 m extra cash for the Royal Berks, and up to £2.56m for Frimley to deal with pressures of demand this winter.

I am pleased they have made this announcement before Christmas, as I wish to see our local hospitals properly staffed and financed.